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RECONSIDERING THE THEORETICAL/PRACTICAL DIVIDE: THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
NISHIDA KITARŌ

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Philosophy  
University of Mississippi

by

LOCKLAND V. TYLER

APRIL 2013



## ABSTRACT

Over the years professional philosophy has undergone a number of significant changes. One of these changes corresponds to an increased emphasis on objectivity among philosophers. In light of new discoveries in logic and science, contemporary analytic philosophy seeks to establish the most objective methods and answers possible to advance philosophical progress in an unambiguous way. By doing so, we are able to more precisely analyze concepts, but the increased emphasis on precision has also been accompanied by some negative consequences. These consequences, unfortunately, are much larger and problematic than many may even realize. What we have eventually arrived in at in contemporary Anglo-American analytic philosophy is a complete repression of humanistic concerns. While these were once the very concerns that Western philosophy prized as most important, they are now all but diminished. Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō recognized this problem before it even came to complete fruition. He however adds an interesting insight, by explaining how approaches that look to completely separate objective knowledge from practical application of it in our everyday lives ignore a fundamental psychological need of all human beings. This natural need is none other than peace of mind. This thesis presents a historical and comparative approach to the theoretical/practical divide in philosophy, by going from ancient, to contemporary, and finally back to the thought of Nishida. The theme of this work will be to encourage a comparative dialectic.

## DEDICATION

This work is in dedication to Dr. Joe Johnson, who first fostered my interest in Japanese philosophy while I was an undergraduate attending Kennesaw State University.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank my committee members Dr. Steven Skultety, Dr. Michelle Sorensen, and Dr. Robert Barnard. I thank Dr. Barnard for always being willing to answer my questions, however distracting they may have been to the rest of the class. I have learned much from our interactions over the course of my graduate career. I also thank Dr. Michelle Sorensen, who has helped to revive my undying interest in Asian philosophies by always being open for discussion and providing insightful and helpful suggestions. I would like to especially thank Dr. Steven Skultety, who has been of immense help to me throughout my time at The University of Mississippi, and has demonstrated a level of professionalism and patience that continues to inspire me. Finally, I would like to thank The University of Mississippi Department of Philosophy. I would never have been able to accomplish what I have without the generous funding assistance given by the department. I will always be grateful.

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## SECTION 1

### INTRODUCTION

Nishida Kitarō (1870- 1945) has been widely recognized as the most influential and respected modern Japanese philosopher. His body of work represents his lifelong development as a scholar and professor of philosophy at Kyoto University. Nishida's first major work, *An Inquiry into the Good (A Study of Good)* is a highly unique and often oversimplified work of comparative philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Many unfamiliar with Nishida's philosophy have dismissed his pioneer work for illegitimate reasons, some of which include his serious involvement in Zen practice, not strictly following a traditional logical structure, or pulling from too many other disciplines no longer widely used in philosophy. This, however, is mistaken and unfortunate. In fact, I think Nishida says some things in his *Inquiry* that may shed needed light on some developing problems in contemporary Western philosophy. The thesis for which I will argue is derived from Nishida's comments in *The Starting Point of the Inquiry* (Ch. 5), where he asserts, "Fundamentally, truth is singular. Intellectual truth and practical truth must be one and the same. Those who think deeply or are genuinely serious inevitably seek congruence between *knowledge* and *the practical realm of feeling and willing*" (37).

This paper has three parts. First, it makes sense of Nishida's claim that humans naturally strive for consistency among their practical and theoretical convictions. It does so by providing a

<sup>1</sup> All quotes in this work are referenced from: Nishida Kitarō, *An Inquiry into the Good*, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).



more extensive historical analysis than Nishida himself provided of the traditions and philosophers explicitly mentioned in *The Starting Point of the Inquiry*. Second, the paper will show that contemporary Western philosophy tends to ignore this natural tendency for a couple of reasons, and argue that this is a major shortcoming. Third, it argues that although this emphasis on consistency is generally a trend of the great philosophies of the past, viable approaches such as this are still possible and should be permitted and respected in philosophy proper. This last point is accomplished by a presentation of Nishida's system of ethics (*energetism*) in line with his phenomenological account of reality as one particularly illuminating example of such approaches.

## SECTION 2

### A HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF NISHIDA'S "STARTING POINT OF THE INQUIRY"

Nishida starts Part II of his *Inquiry* with this bold assertion: "Philosophical views of the world and of human life relate closely to the practical demands of morality and religion, which dictate how people should act and where they can find peace of mind" (37). Right away some readers might be turned off by this. I should start by acknowledging that Nishida's conception of religion and philosophy is drastically different than the typical contemporary Western understanding of the terms. As the upcoming passage begins to indicate, the understood dichotomy between religion and philosophy, for Nishida, is clearly one which is ultimately artificial, and simply created by the demands of human thinking. It will be helpful to look at his elaboration on this:

People are never satisfied with intellectual convictions and practical demands that contradict each other. Those with high spiritual demands fail to find satisfaction in materialism, and those who believe in materialism come to harbor doubts about spiritual demands. Fundamentally, truth is singular. Intellectual truth and practical truth must be one and the same. Those who think deeply or are genuinely serious inevitably seek congruence between *knowledge* and *the practical realm of feeling and willing*. We must now investigate what we ought to do and where we ought to find peace of mind, but this calls for a clarification of the nature of the universe, human life, and true reality. (38)

Nishida then begins his investigation by mentioning the tradition which he feels has historically paid most attention to this:

The Indian religio-philosophical tradition, which provides the most highly developed congruence of philosophy and religion, holds that knowledge is good, and delusion is evil. The fundamental reality of the Universe is *Brahman*, which is our soul, our *Atman*. Knowledge of this identity of *Brahman* and *Atman* is the culmination of Indian philosophy and religion. (38)

Because of this characteristic emphasis of knowledge and self-cultivation as mutually inclusive, Nishida starts here. As Joel Kupperman explains, the *Upanishads* emphasized a way of life in which one can access this divine insight through very specific practical instructions for a life of passivity and meditation.<sup>2</sup> Thus, with the *Upanishads*, there was a philosophical and religious world-view that clearly looked to assimilate (1) theoretical knowledge with (2) practical demands to live a certain kind of life.<sup>3</sup> Put simply, with the Upanishadic approach, practice helps to guide theory, and theory helps to guide practice.

The manifestation of these practical concerns in the Indian religio-philosophical tradition never really went away as they transitioned into various forms throughout history. Many scholars have noted that one important change corresponded to the widespread access of the *Bhagavad Gita*, generally deemed the favorite bible of India.<sup>4</sup> The *Gita* too relies on the metaphysics of the *Upanishads*, but challenges the idea that a life of renunciation is necessarily better than a life of action.<sup>5</sup> As Kupperman correctly points out, the practical thrust of the *Gita* is that social duties manifest in various ways to various people, and accordingly, there are a number of ways to essentially purify the self. But all of these paths focus on essentially a detachment from an ego self which is ultimately deemed artificial and trivial. Again, with the *Gita* it is hard to deny is that there was a serious concern to assimilate (1) theoretical knowledge with (2) the

<sup>2</sup> Joel Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy* (New York and Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1991), 126-127.

<sup>3</sup> The reason for my dichotomy of theoretical and practical knowledge corresponds to the distinctions Nishida himself uses in *An Inquiry into the Good*, though any serious scholar of Nishida knows that the distinction is one of many that will ultimately be deemed artificial. In this regard, the dichotomy does not truly capture the essence of Indian religio-philosophical thought, or the philosophy of Nishida.

<sup>4</sup> As Patton describes, "In great literature, a decision can be a prism through which a culture is refracted into different modes of expression. So, too with the *Gita*: its contents include simple and moving poetry, dense philosophy, moral musing and an explosive description of God. The *Gita*'s greatness lies in these multiple modes of expression." *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Laurie L. Patton (London : Penguin Group Publishing, 2008), Introduction, vii. This perspective of philosophy being able to function through multiple modes of expression will be of particular relevance later on.

<sup>5</sup> Joel Kupperman, *Learning From Asian Philosophy*, 127.

practical demands to live a certain kind of life. While my analysis is limited to these two accounts, there is a multitude of literature one can reference to illustrate this same point.

Nishida next explicitly mentions Christianity. With the Christian tradition, he makes clear that this was a case of prioritizing the practical before the theoretical. As he explains, "Christianity was entirely practical at its inception, but because the human mind insistently demands intellectual satisfaction, Christian philosophy was developed in the Middle Ages" (38). This is perhaps the easiest argument to be made for Nishida. Here the appeal was clearly initially to divine revelation rather than philosophical epistemic justification. However, the need for epistemic justification increased dramatically as the tradition matured, much like it did with the Indian and Chinese traditions. Eventually the tradition theoretically flourished with Christian philosophers like St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine. Interesting accounts were given of the respective roles of faith and reason; religion and philosophy. In essence, attempts at making the practical demands of Christianity congruent with the best theoretical justifications permeated throughout the Middle Ages, and influenced both Christianity and philosophy for many years thereafter.

Nishida next specifically references Chinese thought. He explains,

In the Chinese tradition, the system of morality at first lacked philosophical elaboration, but since the Sung period this dimension has predominated. Such historical trends in the Indian, Christian, and Chinese traditions attest to the basic human demand for congruence between our knowledge and our feeling and will.<sup>6</sup> (38)

The Song period of China was one of religious and philosophical fusion, where important aspects of Buddhist metaphysics and Daoist cosmology were integrated to account for a more

<sup>6</sup> However, Buddhist and Daoist philosophy had of course already created intricate philosophical arguments of their own, but within the Confucian tradition, predating the Song period, the emphasis was primarily more practically motivated than metaphysically motivated, although many metaphysical concepts such as *dao* are of course used throughout the works of Confucius. However, as Ames describes, the central thread of all Confucian thought was, and still is, is self-cultivation.

intellectually cohesive Confucian moral foundation. Leading the way for the period of intellectual flourishing was head of the neo-Confucian movement, Zhu Xi (1130-1200ce). Essentially, the classic Confucian emphasis of self-cultivation was supplemented by Buddhist and Daoist theories of reality.<sup>7</sup> Thus, this historical development is in accordance with Nishida's universal claim of human beings seeking to make the two spheres congruent with one another.

However, to be fair, Confucius had his reasons for focusing more on what most directly confronted human life rather than what was possibly beyond it. He felt that the immediate ethical, political, and familial concerns were more practically important to focus on than abstract metaphysical theorizing. However, the need for enhanced theoretical justification of the Confucian moral foundation increased considerably as the tradition progressed in light of competing ideologies. Moreover, the impact of the Song neo-Confucian movement was long-lasting. As Ames and Rosemont explain, Zhu-Xi's commentary and emphasis on *the Analects*, *the Mencius*, *the Great Learning (Daxue)*, and *the Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong)*, "came to be known as "The Four Books," and served as the core canon of China's civil service examinations for over six hundred years."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, while exclusively Daoist, Buddhist, or

<sup>7</sup> Ames and Rosemont describe this very well: "Combining some themes from *the Analects*, *the Mencius*, *the Book of Changes*, and *the books on ritual*, the syncretic neo-Confucians constructed an explicit metaphysical system that is largely absent in ancient writings, a system designed to counter rich Buddhist metaphysics (and its Daoist variant) which had long held sway conceptually both among the literati and the common people. Continuing the pattern established early in its career--that is, a porous Confucianism absorbing whatever is necessary to sustain it against competing intellectual forces--neo-Confucianism, while overtly repudiating Buddhism and Daoism, expanded to embrace a much enhanced spiritual sensibility drawn from these other traditions.

Put another way, Zhu-Xi and his colleagues did not-by their lights-break with the classical tradition; they saw themselves as returning to the tradition and providing metaphysical underpinnings for the views of Confucius and other ancient cultural heroes. One of the central threads which ties the early and late Confucians together is the importance of self-cultivation--the central theme of the *Analects*--not only for aesthetic development, but for moral strength, the social good, and spiritual insight as well. The neo-Confucian form of discipline involved in self-cultivation takes on a more contemplative aspect than is found in the early writings, but the emphasis on self-cultivation and personal discipline is persistent and pervasive. The sacred is not transcendently removed from the secular." Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1998), 16-17.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Confucian thinkers may now be few and far between in contemporary China (though still present), the *Sanjiao* (three teachings) remain an integral foundation for Chinese thought, even for people who may not consider themselves "religious". Many contemporary Chinese have in fact transitioned into something more like a single cohesive worldview and moral foundation rather than treating the three as separate philosophies and/or religions. This historical movement towards congruence in China further supports Nishida's claim.

Nishida thinks his claim is a universal one, which is indicative of the general human condition, not simply a reflection of how religion or morality must be intellectualized in order to be deemed adequate. Thus, Nishida accurately points out that ancient Western philosophy also once fully endorsed the view that theory and practice should depend upon one another.

Somewhere along the way, however, we have lost sight of this:

In classical Western philosophy beginning with Socrates and Plato, didactic goals were central, where as in modern times knowledge has assumed a prominent position, making the unity of the intellectual and the emotional-volitional aspects more difficult. In fact, the two dimensions now tend to diverge, and this in no way satisfies the fundamental demands of the human mind. (38)

Let us start then by examining the philosophical approach of Socrates. As Cohen, Curd, and Reeve point out, throughout the progression of elenchic dialogues, four essentially Socratic ideas remain in tact, while the others seem to fade away at the hands of the Socratic Method:

(1) The conventionally distinguished virtues-justice, piety, courage, and the rest-are all in fact identical to a single state of the soul, namely, wisdom or knowledge (Meno 87d-89a; cf. Protagoras selections). (2) Possession of this knowledge is necessary and sufficient for happiness (Crito 48b, Gorgias 470e, Republic 353e-354a). (3) No one ever does what he knows or believes to be other than the best, so that weakness of will, or acting against what one knows or believes to be best, is impossible (Protagoras selections). (4) It is better to suffer injustice than to do it (Apology 28b, Gorgias selection).<sup>9</sup>

Understood properly, (1) and (2) actually indicate that for Socrates, the primary value of pursuing a life of serious philosophy is not simply to achieve theoretical clarity. Further insight

<sup>9</sup> *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: From Thales to Aristotle*, trans. S. Marc Cohen, Patricia Curd, and C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2005), 91. All references to the original work of Plato and Aristotle are derived from this source

from Cohen, Curd, and Reeve supports my claim:

The goal of an elenchus is not simply to reach adequate definitions of the virtues or seemingly paradoxical doctrines about weakness of will and virtue, however; it also aims at *moral reformation*. For Socrates believes that regular elenctic philosophizing-leading the examined life-makes people happier and more virtuous than anything else (see Apology 30a, 36c-e, 38a, 41b-c). Perhaps he believes this because he believes that virtue is the very knowledge to which the elenchus leads. In any case, philosophizing is so important for human welfare, on Socrates' view, that he is willing to accept execution rather than give it up (29b-d).<sup>10</sup>

Knowledge, for Socrates, was the most important possession in human life. But the grasping of truth via the dialectical method was fully intended to determine the course of our *actions*, not just the extent of our theoretical understanding. This is what is meant when it is pointed out that the *elenchus* ultimately aimed at moral reformation. Of course, philosophy, for Socrates, was viewed as something which directly influences how we live our lives and view the world. Here, unlike the Confucian and Christian traditions, the theoretical knowledge was seen as so powerful that it essentially leads the practice, but theory and practice are still intimately intertwined with one another. This is the distinction I wish to consistently make in contrast with the typical contemporary analytic model. Indeed, Socrates felt self-examination through a life of philosophizing was so important that he was willing to die for it. Practical demands to live a certain kind of life were intimately intertwined with a theoretical account of reality. Philosophy functioned in a powerful and practical way.

Nishida also explicitly mentions Plato, founder of the Athenian Academy. Of the limited knowledge we have of the Academy, what is noteworthy is that practical concerns were very much intertwined with an eclectic approach to theoretical knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Awareness of this helps to strengthen Nishida's claim that for these paradigmatic ancient Western philosophers, a

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> As Cohen, Curd, and Reeve describe, "What evidence we do have makes it clear that the academy was a center of research both in theoretical subjects and also in more practical ones. Metaphysics, epistemology, psychology, ethics, politics, and aesthetics all grew and developed there, as did mathematical science. " Ibid.

theoretical account of reality was not enough to exhaust the potential role of philosophy.

Philosophy, in its most robust form, fully accounted for both aspects of learning. A further elaboration by Cohen, Curd, and Reeve clarifies my point:

Aristotle studied there for twenty years. But members of the academy were also invited by a variety of cities--Arcadia, Pyrrha, Cidus, and Stagira are all mentioned- to help them develop new political constitutions. Thus it would be quite wrong to think that Plato and the other Academicians perpetually had their heads in the clouds. If this were so, they would hardly have been much use to politicians confronting practical constitutional problems.

The mixture of theory and practice-of abstract speculation and more practical application-was, no doubt, part of philosophy from its very founding. (Even for us, indeed, the word "Wisdom" continues to connote both the esoteric and the down-to-earth.) But Plato does more, perhaps, than any other of his predecessors to convince us that we may have to cast our net very wide and dig very deep--that we may have to understand how *things* in the broadest sense of the term *hang together* in the broadest sense of the term--if we are to obey the Socratic commandment to know ourselves or discover how best to live.<sup>12</sup>

This passage helps to explain why Nishida explicitly mentions Socrates and Plato as putting didactic concerns central to their philosophies. Of course they both focused extensively on the theoretical aspect of philosophy. Yet emphasis on moral reformation was an immensely important facet. In fact, it was debatably the most important facet, because it was that which was viewed as determining human happiness and directing human action. This is what Nishida means when he says that didactic concerns were "central" to their philosophies.

Nishida neglects to explicitly mention Aristotle in *The Starting Point of the Inquiry*, though he does preface his categorization of classical Western philosophy by saying, "beginning with Socrates and Plato" as opposed to "ending with Socrates and Plato" (38). Also, in Part III: *The Good*, Nishida makes clear how his own ethical theory is in large part derived from both Plato and Aristotle. Furthermore, Nishida held a keen interest for the works of Aristotle throughout his career. In his work "East-West Synthesis in Kitarō Nishida", Matao Noda goes so far to label one of four distinctive phases of Nishidian thought as being primarily concerned with the work of Aristotle, although he cites influence derived from both Husserl and Plato as well

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 95-96.



during this phase.<sup>13</sup>

To show just how much emphasis Aristotle put on self-cultivation through philosophy, we need to look no further than the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The type of self-cultivation Aristotle emphasized was not simply a way to achieve theoretical clarity and stop there, thus fully separating one's theoretical account of reality from one's practical demands to live a certain life. The two spheres were more intimately intertwined than that. In Book II, Chapter I, Aristotle distinguishes between two sorts of virtue: virtues of thought, and virtues of character:

Virtue then, is of two sorts, virtue of thought and virtue of character. Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching, and hence needs experience and time. Virtue of character <i.e. of *ethos*> results from habit <*ethos*>; hence its name 'ethical', slightly varied from '*ethos*'.

Hence it is also clear that none of the virtues of character arises in us naturally....Thus the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature. Rather, we are by nature able to acquire them, and reach our complete perfection through habit. [1103a 15-26]

While virtues of character are distinguished from virtues of thought, the understanding of how we acquire virtues of character is what fundamentally enables an Aristotelian to live a more virtuous, happier life, as he explains in Chapter II:

Our present inquiry does not aim, as our others do, at study; for the purpose of our examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us. Hence we must examine the right way to act, since, as we have said, the actions also control the states we acquire. [1103b]

Thus, Aristotelian ethics represents another strong commitment to the idea that knowledge of the theoretical corresponds directly to practical demands to live a certain kind of life.

Aristotle also says some relevant things to my project when he shortly thereafter discusses the nature of ethical inquiry:

But let us take it as agreed in advance that every account of the actions we must do has to be stated in outline, not exactly. As we also said at the start, the type of accounts we demand should reflect the subject matter; and questions about actions and expediency, like questions about health, have

<sup>13</sup> Matao Noda, "East-West Synthesis in Kitarō Nishida," *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Jan., 1995): 345-359, <http://0-www.jstor.org.umiss.lib.olemiss.edu/stable/1396743> (accessed January 31, 2013). For example, he says this can be seen if we look to Nishida's *The System of the Self-conscious Universal* (1930), where ontological concerns of an Aristotelian nature (*substance*) lead Nishida to his concept of *Basho*, and eventually to favor non-being over being.

no fixed <and invariable answers>. And when our general account is so inexact, the account of particular cases is still more inexact. For these fall under no craft or profession, and the agents themselves must consider in each case what the opportune action is, as doctors and navigators do. The account we offer, then, in our present inquiry is of this inexact sort; still, we must try to offer help. [1104a]

Indeed, Aristotle acknowledges that ethical inquiry will essentially never mirror say, natural scientific inquiry. The reason for this is perfectly explicable. As Aristotle says, the accounts given will all be relative to a number of extenuating factors, including external (as in, relative to the situation/place) and internal factors (as in, relative to the individual). This awareness of inevitable inexactitude and relativity in ethical theory can also be identified when we look to Aristotle's *Theory of the mean* [Book II, Chapters V-IX].

Moreover, Aristotle adds another extremely important insight by asserting human beings are by nature social and political [See *Politics* Book I, chapter 2 for the most famous versions of these claims]. This is a sentiment very similar to Confucius, and supported by Nishida, that a life completely devoid of political and social concern would be an incomplete (not to mention irresponsible) life for a human being. Because human beings are by nature social and political creatures, it only makes sense to fully cultivate those aspects of learning, and venture from theoretical knowledge of reality and the human condition to living a certain kind of life. This, by the way, was a fundamental insight that Nishida thought Aristotle got exactly right, as he suggests in the following passage from *The Goal of Good Conduct*: "I think that Aristotle gets at an indisputable truth when he states at the beginning of his study of politics that people are social animals"<sup>14</sup> (138).

Lastly, I would be remiss to leave unacknowledged the relevance of Zen Buddhism to both this discussion and Nishida's overall project. Nishida's philosophy frequently incorporates

<sup>14</sup> Here Nishida is using Aristotle's insight to eventually explain how the greatest human good is such for both the individual and the collective, and how individual consciousness within communities lead to a greater community consciousness.

Zen concepts, though he rarely explicitly mentions and identifies Zen concepts as providing sole justifications for philosophical theses. Part of the reason for this is that he knew what type of criticism would come from such an approach, given the way professional academic philosophy had been carried out in the West. However, another reason is simply he does not wish or need to do this. This is debatable among Nishida scholars, but someone like me views his insights as usually being far more compounded and comparative than being specifically indicative of Zen or Buddhism exclusively. His entire project in the *Inquiry* is consistently pluralistic, and operates under the assumption that truth is fundamentally singular in nature. However, truth has been expressed various ways with various traditions, and it is always interesting to see the affinities between Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophical ideas in the works of Nishida. Zen remained an integral part of Nishida's approach throughout his career, and the Zen tradition also provides a great example of the point of view Nishida is trying to express regarding the interrelationship of the theoretical and the practical.

For example, the work of Eihei Dōgen (1200-1253) expresses this perspective perfectly. Dōgen was a pioneer figure of the transmission of Zen Buddhism from China to Japan, and founder of the Sōtō School of Zen. While the deep philosophical messages throughout the works of Dōgen are intentionally paradoxical, poetic, and imaginative, his practical instructions for attaining enlightenment are specific and objective. With his explicit instructions for engaging in his meditation of *zazen*, we can see exactly how specific these instructions were:

If you wish to attain enlightenment, begin at once to practice *zazen*. For this meditation you need a quiet room; food and drink should be taken in moderation. Free yourself from all attachments and bring to rest ten thousand things. Think not of good or evil; judge not on right or wrong; maintain the flow of mind, will and consciousness; bring to an end all desire, all concepts and judgments!

To sit properly, first lay down a thick pillow and on top of this a second (round) one. One may sit either in the full or half cross-legged position. In the full position one places the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh. In the half position, only the left foot is placed upon the right thigh. Robe and belt should be worn loosely, but in order. The right hand rests on the left foot, while the back of the left hand rests on the palm of the right. The two thumbs are

placed in juxtaposition. Let the body be kept upright, leaning neither to the left nor to the right, neither forward nor backward. Ears and shoulders, nose and navel must be aligned to one another. The tongue is to be kept against the palate, lips and teeth firmly closed, while the eyes should always be left open.

Now that the bodily position is in order, regulate your breathing. If a wish arises, take note of it and then dismiss it! If you practice in this way for a long time, you will forget all attachments and concentration will come naturally. That is the art of *zazen*. *Zazen* is the Dharma gate of great rest and joy.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, while the practical instructions for *zazen* were specific and rigid, what one is said to experience by engaging in it is profound, enlightening, and blissful. We see this with the closing of Dōgen's description that *zazen* was for him a way to achieve "great rest and joy". This, by the way, is very close to what Nishida referred to as the function of the practical demands of morality and religion in *The Starting Point of the Inquiry*. I should make clear, however, that it is not that every Zen Buddhist must engage in *zazen*. Buddhism, in general, has proven to be receptive to various techniques and approaches throughout history. Many Zen Buddhists these days may not feel the need to meditate. But by understanding the type of approach one of the prominent figures in Japanese Zen recommended, we can in many ways better understand some of the foundational theoretical aspects of Nishida's thought. Moreover, in his work "William James and Kitarō Nishida on "Pure Experience" (2007), Joel Krueger agrees with this insight.<sup>16</sup>

Krueger however points out that while Dōgen was an immensely important figure for Japanese Zen Buddhism, Nishida's primary academic source for Zen was D.T. Suzuki, who generally held a dismissive attitude towards the works of Dōgen. Also, Krueger points out that Nishida trained *Rinzai*, rather than Sōtō Zen, and accordingly, focused less directly on Dōgen than one might imagine. Still, he asserts that while Nishida was not as immediately linked to Dōgen as many might assume, the two philosophers bear striking resemblance with regards to

<sup>15</sup> Henrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*. Volume 2: *Japan* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Inc., 2005), 76.

<sup>16</sup> Joel Krueger, "William James and Kitarō Nishida on "Pure Experience", Consciousness, and Moral Psychology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 2007), 204-205, footnote 47.

their most fundamental assumptions, as was later pointed out by Nishida's contemporaries like Keiji Nishitani. This is particularly clear, he says, when we look to how Nishida's "emphasis on the bodily basis of mind and moral interrelatedness bears closely to many of Dōgen's provocative views on these issues."<sup>17</sup> In other words, regarding the fundamental insight in which this thesis is looking to capture, Krueger agrees that the philosophy of Dōgen is the best to consult.

Clearly Dōgen also demonstrated this conviction that theoretical knowledge is not the only thing to focus seriously on when it comes to truly attaining 'enlightenment'. As Dumoulin points out, "By no means does Dōgen wish to deny the unity of body and mind, only to insist that a theoretical knowledge of this unity is not enough. One must realize it in *zazen*. Thus, he explains that in the *Bendōwa* Dōgen emphasizes that "the Buddha-Dharma from the first preaches that the body and mind are not two, that substance and form are not two."<sup>18</sup> In laymen's terms, the practical and theoretical have always been deeply interconnected with Buddhism, in general. But with the pioneer of Japanese Zen, we see a prime example of practical demands, through the unity of body and mind, culminating with very specific instructions. These instructions were intimately connected to a metaphysical view of reality, and expressed harmoniously with that theory through the practice of *zazen*, where both the practice, and the enlightenment, is to be appropriately viewed as one and the same process. Thus, Zen attempts to assimilate the theoretical with the practical in a most profound way.

This is all revolving around a perspective where true reality, as it is, exhibits no subject/object distinction; rather, only one fluid experience. With the works of Dōgen, one frequently finds the idea that subject and object, in true reality, are not divided. To this end, *zazen* gives instructions on how to access the reality beyond subject and object, by dropping the

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Henrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*. Volume 2: *Japan*, 78.

body and mind, letting go the desires and the illusions of the self, and uniting with the myriad of things. Someone like Nishida essentially shares this view, but takes it as his difficult goal to explain how pure experience can ultimately lead to philosophical knowledge. Various theories can be made compatible with such a view, but of particular interest to Nishida was American pragmatist William James, with his theory of *neutral monism*.

In closing this section, I have made sense of Nishida's opening statements in *The Starting Point of the Inquiry* by historical and philosophical explication. Nishida believed that philosophy, in its most robust form, must combine theoretical and practical concerns harmoniously. I have shown that a closer examination of the Indian religio-philosophical tradition, the Christian tradition, the neo-Confucian tradition, and ancient Western philosophy supports Nishida's perspective on this point. Nishida's experience and understanding of Zen Buddhism also functions as a foundational insight implicit throughout his works, yet seemingly never exhausts his philosophical justifications. This is important to keep in mind moving forward.

### SECTION 3

## THE DISMISSAL OF PRACTICAL DEMANDS IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

Section II focused on Nishida's comments on the historical emphasis of making theoretical knowledge and practical demands congruent with one another in order to live a truly fulfilled life. The next section will ask what reasons, if any, prevent this type of approach from being accepted in contemporary analytic philosophy. I will argue that certain initial themes of the analytic philosophical movement still severely restrict such an approach from entering professional philosophical discourse. However, I do not wish to assert that these themes alone exhaustively account for why such an approach is not prevalent. I will also argue that there are other cultural and political factors which contribute to this dismissal, and collectively, these reasons have led to the view that practical demands to live a certain kind of life are simply beyond the purview of academic philosophy.

The popular sentiment in contemporary analytic philosophy has become such that the demand to reconcile theory and practice may be better suited for religion, psychology, psychiatry, poetry, literature, or sociology, but certainly not for philosophy. Moreover, while many claim analytic philosophy today only refers to methodological clarity and rigor, the preferred methodology still has implications as far as what type of approach it does or does not allow. Furthermore, with regards to Anglo-American professional philosophy, the analytic approach has become such a dominant model at the most politically powerful institutions that for many

students of philosophy, it seems like the only approach available.<sup>19</sup> This carries with it various repercussions about how we should or should not conduct philosophy. To help explain this sentiment, we can first look to Brand Blanshard's comments in *Reason and Analysis*:

While the analytic movement is not single cohesive school with agreed upon doctrines, this does not mean the movement of philosophical analysis has not in fact initiated a philosophical revolution. It has done so in many respects, because the lasting implications of the analysts carry significant philosophical restrictions to how we 'ought' to carry out philosophy proper.<sup>20</sup>

Blanshard then describes five restrictive themes, as he explains "What unites the analysts is a set of tendencies, tastes, and aversions."<sup>21</sup>

(A) They are all loyal to science, and place the authority of science above that of philosophical speculation. Put simply, philosophy is to function as a useful tool for the clarification of science, and must be in accordance with pre-established scientific facts. It is not something that starts without the pre-established scientific facts, which in turn forms new knowledge.

(B) While they place science on a philosophical pedestal, they think metaphysics has no place in philosophy. Metaphysicians are misguided poets. Moreover, to the analysts, there is a reason that the metaphysical pseudo-questions which have troubled philosophers for thousands of years remain unanswered. It is because they are unanswerable and meaningless. Metaphysical claims are just mistaken forms of emotion and poetry which have no empirical justification.

(C) Intimately related to this detest of metaphysics, is the intense dislike of 'flowery language', or anything appealing to emotion, beauty, morality, or is highly speculative (yes, the type of philosophy that probably got many of us interested in philosophy in the first place). Hegel and Heidegger are no better philosophically than an unphilosophical theologian. All of these guys have no place in philosophy. "They prefer to take their facts bare of unction or spleen, and are suspicious particularly of any view that answers to the heart's desire."<sup>22</sup>

(D) They all aim for precision. Many of them were originally mathematicians (Russell, Ramsey, Carnap, and Wittgenstein), and all of them prize mathematical logic as a hugely important

<sup>19</sup> This could use some clarification. The following contemporary Western Anglo-American philosophers are immune to my criticisms: (1) one who emphasizes ancient Philosophy, the likes of Aristotle or Plato, or (2) one emphasizes a generally Continental and/or comparative approach to philosophy. Regarding (1), the resurgence of virtue ethics continues to be a promising field for contemporary philosophy. For this contemporary Western philosopher, my project may be deemed purely supplemental, but the encouragement of a comparative dialectic within virtue ethics (much insight is to be gained from the Confucian tradition) will be an additional feature. Regarding (2), there is a certain philosophical circle in the West that generally encourages more Continental and comparative approaches to philosophy. While these two categories may not correspond to the majority or the more politically powerful group of contemporary Western philosophers, these approaches are fully immune to my criticisms. Of course, there will always be exceptions to any generalization. Some analytic philosophers may simultaneously focus on Asian and ancient approaches to philosophy. By the end of this work, it should be clear that these types of exceptions are the very types of approaches that this work encourages.

<sup>20</sup> Brand Blanshard, *Reason and Analysis* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1962), 95.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.



achievement in philosophy. Accordingly, they all wish they could transform philosophical discourse into something as precise as mathematical language.

(E) They all agree on the significance of language informing our philosophical views, but they differ greatly to the extent in which they hold this view. Some prioritize common usage as authoritative, some view common usage as infecting philosophy, and some try to utilize their tools with an attempt to construct their own philosophical language as an ideal.

[Reconstructed from Chapter III.3 of *Reason and Analysis*]<sup>23</sup>

It should first be clarified that Blanshard does not separate and organize the themes as clearly as my outline presents. His description is a rather lengthy two paragraph explanation, though he does recognize and explain all five of the themes explicitly. The organization, for this paper, is intended for the purpose of clarity and analysis. To be clear, all five form a cohesive sentiment, and as such, all five mutually inform one another in various ways. Any successful analysis of the themes and their function in contemporary analytic philosophy should be sensitive of this. In many regards, (D) could be seen as the most fundamental, which in turn informs the stances regarding (A), (B), (C), and (E). However, the first three, (A), (B), and (C), are particularly restrictive of the type of approaches covered in section II, and as such, will be focused on extensively.

Let us start off by discussing (A). Unfortunately, this general attitude, though it carries its own potentially positive justification, is in the end far too restrictive to allow for the type of harmonious theoretical/practical approach aforementioned in section II. The reason for this is precisely the reason that Aristotle pointed to: ethics is an inexact science, and thus, ethics cannot be approached as if it were mathematical physics. As we saw earlier, Aristotle believed ethics is more like practicing medicine or navigation. However, in the analytic tradition, inexact sciences are generally not welcome in philosophy. Philosophy is supposed to be objective, clear, and unambiguous. Because of this, most analytic philosophers either do one of two things regarding

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 94-96.

their attitudes towards practical demands in philosophy proper. The first option is to agree that a discussion of achieving ethical wisdom from philosophy will not be on par with the clarity possible in the natural sciences, mathematics, and formal logic, and thus, accordingly dismiss it altogether from philosophical discourse. The other option is to disagree with Aristotle's point, and think that with the development of modern science we can now place ethical wisdom on par with physical science.

Unfortunately, both options lead to views that fail to fulfill the natural psychological demand to which Nishida refers. I say this as someone who both accepts modern science, yet sees it inadequate to exhaustively inform my philosophical views. I do not wish to imply that ethics can learn absolutely nothing from science in contemporary philosophical discourse. In the case of environmental ethics, for example, ethics can and should receive valuable insight from physical science. But with regards to human happiness, the physical-scientific perspective is limited at best. Therefore, I only wish to assert that if we continue to limit all philosophical inquiry to necessarily being mutually supported by or informed by physical science, our potential for philosophical enrichment will be severely limited with regards to achieving practical demands to live a happy life.

There is an immensely important facet of philosophy that is now generally being repressed: the humanistic element of philosophy. This is the element of philosophy that connects our theoretical convictions to the way we interact with one another in the world. The current model simply does not satisfy all of our natural psychological interests, nor should it. To help to reiterate my point, Blanshard can again help. Blanshard elucidates this point in his elaboration of the effects of the analytic philosophical revolution:

They are effecting an attendant revolution of a subtler kind. *They are changing the temper and atmosphere in which philosophy is pursued.* Students of philosophy are usually attracted to it by one or other of two motives, which may be called the humanistic and the scientific. The

humanistic interest is brooding, vague, groping, and personal. It wants to know what are the pole-stars by which a life may be profitably steered, where one stands in the larger scheme of things, what sort of creature man is- whether an animal whose destiny it is to occupy six feet of ground, or an immortal soul, what sort of place the world is- whether a vast, mindless mechanism or a universe in whose structure and history an inquiring intelligence meets an answering intelligence, and perhaps even values and affections more or less like its own. This motive, in which poetic, mystical, and religious impulses are blended with the speculative, seems to have been the moving force in most of the great philosophers of the past.<sup>24</sup>

As Blanshard explains, the approaches to philosophy that are not scientific come in various forms, and have had historically various justifications of their own sort. Moreover, he is correct in pointing out that some students of philosophy gravitate more naturally to one aspect or the other. However, nowadays many students simply gravitate to the scientific aspect because the humanistic aspect is now generally repressed as a secondary offshoot of immature philosophy in the dominant contemporary Anglo-American model. On this view, scientific progress and logical analysis have seemingly made humanistic concerns anachronistic and quaint. The very foundational restrictive elements have continued to repress the humanistic element, as Blanshard foresaw. They limit the number of students who will feel comfortable or interested in pursuing philosophy in the first place, and they restrict those students who already have chosen to pursue philosophy. These limitations would be understandable and beneficial if the analytic model has been objectively proven to be the better approach to philosophy, but it hasn't.

Put simply, an approach that assumes all philosophy must be must be conducted on the model of mathematical physics suppresses most of the more humanistic oriented approaches before they are even considered. The reason for this suppression is not fully unjustified: as mentioned, (D), the analyst aims for precision. The aim of precision, and the loyalty to physics was, after all, the thrust of the logical positivist movement. Nearly all had backgrounds in physics, while a couple had other scientific backgrounds. But when this precision and loyalty to

<sup>24</sup> Blanshard, *Reason and Analysis*, 95.

science is expected to account for all areas of thought equally is where we may have a problem. Many of us may in fact think the intended precision should fluctuate appropriately according to subject matter, thus allowing room for the speculative, religious, and poetic, as well as the scientific. Even further, many of us may side with Nishida, and say the truly gifted poet is actually capturing reality more precisely than the scientist is, and yet, we refuse to let poetry back into philosophy. Some of us may simply think that physical science, though immensely valuable to philosophy, should not be the all-encompassing model for philosophy. Moreover, many of us may think philosophy is what should create and inform new science--much like was the case with Aristotle and Newton--not *only* the other way around.

The big problem with (A), then, is that it is far too restrictive of various valuable approaches to philosophy, and presents philosophy in far too narrow a fashion for young people interested in studying it. This in no way helps to foster the growth of philosophy, and more specifically, limits inquiries of an aesthetic or ethical nature, which we need now more than ever to make philosophy rescue itself from obscurity and start actually making a difference in peoples' lives once again. Philosophy can learn from physical science, but physical science is not all there is to philosophy. We cannot shut off more traditional approaches to philosophy simply because we think we have found a method that works. And if our method suggests that it, and only it, is the exhaustive key to unlocking knowledge of the entire universe, and no other method is acceptable, it may behoove us to become skeptical of the scope of the overall method, especially if it is not giving us all of the definitive answers it was intended to. People always used to use the cliché that philosophers are trained to "think outside the box", but how are we to justify this claim when philosophy has become nothing more than putting together pieces of a logical puzzle, inside the standard logical and scientific box? It would seem that the potential of

discursive thought is far more creative than that, and appropriately, we may want to reconsider approaches that fall outside of the boxes, even if we are at first hesitant. We should keep our logic, but we should always remain open to alternative logics, as Nishida did, and we should also remain sensitive to the proper scope of logic. For many of us, formal logic is but a small tool for how we can achieve various levels of understanding.

Moving forward, (B): the general aversion to metaphysics will now be addressed. This theme has made an interesting transition, as significant changes have taken place regarding this sentiment since Blanshard's publication. However, there is still a general aversion for what I will refer to as "traditional metaphysics" in the analytic tradition.<sup>25</sup> Metaphysics is now allowed in contemporary analytic philosophy, but only of a certain brand. This, however, was not always the case. At one point many analytic philosophers were under the impression that metaphysics of any sort is utterly inappropriate for philosophy proper. And this has indeed held lasting implications. Two of the most influential attempts can be found in the work of Rudolph Carnap and Alfred Jules Ayer.

Carnap wrote his essay, *The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language* in 1932.<sup>26</sup> He makes some interesting claims here, which can be simplified as asserting that the language used by the metaphysician is cognitively meaningless, and that the metaphysician is more of a misplaced artist than a credible philosopher. For Carnap, a metaphysician's assertions only express one thing: the metaphysician's attitude toward life.

<sup>25</sup> We have to keep in mind the time of Blanshard's publication, but also acknowledge that these general sentiments he describes remain for the most part, surprisingly accurate. The type of metaphysics which has emerged in contemporary discourse is far different than traditional metaphysics, or even the "metaphysical concept poetry" of Heidegger that the logical positivists so despised. There are still some alternative approaches to current metaphysical problems in contemporary analytic philosophy, even some of which employ insight derived from ancient Western philosophy. These types of attempts however are not the standard approach, and are often greeted with highly critical or dismissive responses.

<sup>26</sup> Rudolf Carnap, *The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis*, taken from *Logical Positivism*, ed., Ayer (New York: The Free Press, 1959).

He had an interesting account as to why metaphysicians always commit the same mistakes. It goes something like this: many of the words used by a metaphysician (e.g. 'principle') are created by people who are not doing metaphysics. As such, they initially contain fixed appropriate meanings, but are over time adopted by philosophers who are unsatisfied with their appropriate empirically oriented meaning and chose to use the terms on their own accord instead. The terms are eventually applied to sentences to produce assertions which are neither empirically founded nor falsifiable. This renders them both useless for philosophy and utterly meaningless. The term's prior empirically derived criterion for satisfying this description gets recycled and becomes part of the metaphysician's lexicon, but without any new specification of meaning as to what can appropriately satisfy the new use of the term. This is Carnap's explanation of words leading to metaphysical pseudo-statements.<sup>27</sup> Carnap also differentiated a second type of problem, where all of the words in use remain meaningful, but they are arranged in a way which results in something again devoid of meaning. This is the type of thing that would occur if we were to assert "Caesar is a prime number", which is syntactically correct, yet still meaningless for Carnap.<sup>28</sup>

Shifting now to the alternative attack on metaphysics, A.J. Ayer had admiration and much philosophical commonalities with Carnap. Below is a passage from Ayer's attack, which uses very similar arguments as Carnap's:

Among those who recognize that it philosophy is to be accounted a genuine branch of knowledge it must be defined in such a way as to distinguish it from metaphysics, it is fashionable to speak of

<sup>27</sup> Because of this, he adopted the following method to safeguard from such pseudo-statements where violation of logical syntax occurs: "Let 'a' be any word and 'S(a)' the elementary sentence in which it occurs. Then the sufficient and necessary condition for 'a' being meaningful may be given by each of the following formulations, which ultimately say the same thing: 1. The empirical criteria for a are known. 2. It has been stipulated from what protocol sentences 'S(a)' is deducible. 3. The truth-conditions for 'S(a)' are fixed. 4. The method of verification of 'S(a)' is known" Rudolf Carnap, *The Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis*, taken from *Logical Positivism*, ed., Ayer (New York: The Free Press, 1959), 64.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 68.

the metaphysician as a kind of misplaced poet. As his statements have no literal meaning, they are not subject to any criteria of truth or falsehood: but they may still serve to express, or arouse, emotion, and thus be subject to ethical or aesthetic standards. And it is suggested that they may have considerable value, as means of moral inspiration, or even as works of art. In this way, an attempt is made to compensate the metaphysician for his extrusion from philosophy.<sup>29</sup>

Yet Ayer would not even give the metaphysician the compensation of achieving poetic value.

He had reverence for the true poet, but felt the metaphysician was simply necessarily inadvertently making errors derived from inappropriate linguistic usage and faulty reasoning.

This much can be inferred from his next elaboration, when he compared the two to one another:

"The metaphysician, on the other hand, does not intend to write nonsense. He lapses into it through being deceived by grammar, or through committing errors of reasoning, such as that which leads to the view that the sensible world is unreal. But it is not the mark of a poet to make mistakes of this sort."<sup>30</sup>

Both Carnap and Ayer felt fully justified that metaphysics should be eliminated from philosophy if philosophy is to be deemed credible. This much is clear. In order to get the ball rolling, they had to develop a principle to distinguish cognitively meaningful statements from meaningless metaphysical ones. This took the form of the *principle of verifiability*. The principle would also be strongly endorsed other positivists, some of which, like Schlick, endorsed a stricter, 'conclusive' type of verifiability than Ayer did as a criterion, but this approach proved even more problematic than Ayer's, as it entailed cases like "arsenic is poisonous"; "all men are mortal"; and "a body tends to expand when its heated.", were either completely nonsensical (though important) claims, or that they were simply cases of general laws which cannot in theory be conclusively verified, thus seemingly undermining the principle.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the principle never really could possess the consistency it was intended to. Part of the

<sup>29</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1952), 44.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 37.

problem was that there was never really an agreed upon version. Regardless, it is not my objective to argue exactly how problematic these attempts were (this is still a very contentious topic, and not surprisingly usually reflective of which type of philosophy someone is interested in), but these attempts should however serve as sufficient examples of this general aversion to metaphysics that culminated with the logical positivist movement.

Since then, new metaphysics has flourished, but as previously mentioned, this is metaphysics of a different type. It is almost always highly engrained in logic, linguistic analysis, and scientism. For example, one of the most discussed subjects these days in the contemporary analytic approach to ontology revolves heavily around the ordinary object debate. Are we to continue to use terms like "tennis balls", or should we revert to the ultra precise philosophical language of "particles arranged tennis ball-wise"? The former sentiment, ultimately derived from insight given by Carnap, is represented by contemporary metaphysicians such as Amie Thomasson. The latter represents attitudes indicative of Russell (to what extent is debatable) and Quine, and later on eliminativists like Trent Merricks.<sup>32</sup> Similar approaches are applied to identity, including personal identity, throughout contemporary metaphysics. Of course, this is a generalization, and there are rare exceptions, but this type of method is the standard contemporary analytic approach. Of course this type of metaphysics is very important in its own regard. As an expression of the impressive developments in modern science and logic, this strand of metaphysics has its own right to flourish. Still, this is not to say that all contemporary metaphysics should be of this type, as it seems to be. Some metaphysical approaches may

<sup>32</sup> For a good description of these positions, see Amie Thomasson's *Ordinary Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Thomasson looks to essentially vindicate the Carnapean approach to metaphysics, by arguing that the 'serious' metaphysicians are drastically confused, due to not properly specifying linguistic frameworks and application conditions for 'existence'.



simply not follow this type of method and justification, and yet, still be immensely valuable for philosophy. Some may better address the humanistic concerns rather than the scientific ones.

But, for the analytic tradition, and again, now generally the contemporary Western Anglo-American model, the type of metaphysics Carnap and Ayer were attacking are still generally viewed as fallacious philosophies constructed by misplaced poets being duped by inappropriate linguistic usage. For example, Hegelian or Heideggerian approaches to metaphysics (ones emphasizing something like 'God', or 'spirit', or ones employing a unique phenomenological perspective) are largely dismissed. We can see the first examples of this sentiment throughout the works of Carnap, Ayer, and Russell, but the sentiment very much lingers. These seeds of skepticism towards certain types of metaphysical philosophy have remained for the most part unchallenged as the providing the correct foundational view for philosophy proper. Anything religious; anything emotive; anything describing synthesis, or spirit; these are generally viewed as naive approaches to philosophy. This assumption, justifiably picking up on the ways in which human motives are ultimately derived from human nature; a human nature which is in fact motivated by a natural religious demand, assumes that such religious demands cannot be made cohesive with justifiable theories of reality. When we look further to Nishida's approach, we will see this is not always the case. For Nishida, a better understanding of the natural religious demand of human beings will in turn help to construct a viable theory of reality itself, and the good, as we will see later.

Moving forward then, I will now focus extensively on (C), the dislike of flowery language and the weariness of all philosophy which triggers emotion. By now it should be clearer that this tendency is a large reason for why metaphysics of a certain type is generally still discouraged in the analytic tradition. However, it has also had lasting implications in the realm

of ethics, or more accurately, it has made us ask whether or not we should even study ethics.

This culminated with the emotivist theory.

While emotivism was essentially a byproduct of Humean skepticism, it should come as no surprise that Ayer and the positivists turned into something far more extreme:

The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. Thus if I say to someone, "You acted wrongly in stealing that money," I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, "You stole that money." In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, "You stole that money," in a particular tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks. The tone, or the exclamation marks, adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings in the speaker.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, emotivism is a prime example of how the foundations of analytic thought were accompanied by attempts to completely eliminate ethics from philosophy. Interestingly, even with as many problems the emotivist view has, something very close to it is still seems to be the go-to view of ethics for many in the analytic tradition.<sup>34</sup> To look to an example of prominent analytic philosophers who endorsed the view for much of their careers, we need to look no further than perhaps the most influential analytic philosopher of all, Bertrand Russell.

While it is not my objective to point to exactly how problematic the emotivist theory is, it is my objective to point to the now obvious connection between views like emotivism and the

<sup>33</sup> Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> To point to some acknowledged problems with the view, in Blanshard's *Reason and Goodness*, he points to the three general deficiencies with emotivism: "(I) The theory makes goodness external to that which has it; (II) it leaves no basis in the object for either favoring or disfavoring; and (III) it makes reflection about values far more irrational than in fact it is." Regarding (I), emotivism does indeed assume that whatever it is that is being described by an ethical symbol is in fact only possessed by the person evaluating the action. This seems odd in reflection. This being the case, regarding (II), whatever assumed value the action might have is dismissed as only an internal feeling of the person evaluating it, thus seemingly completely discrediting our reasons to postulate any value judgments. But we seem to have far more reasons to prefer, say, philosophical dialogue to shooting people. This in turn leads us to (III), which is simply, this description seems counterintuitive to the real reasons for why we value some actions more than others, as we seem to have far more justifications than this account allows. When Hume said ethical judgments are not ultimately derived from reason, this is not what he meant. The theory, then, is not without problems, and in my own opinion hardly seems justifiable if we are to interpret it less in the Humean manner, and more in the positivist or analyst manner. But the important point to be made is that analytic thought has carried with it harsh attacks on the view that practical demands to live a certain life should be part of philosophy proper. And large contributing reasons for this assumption are in fact these foundational themes of analytic philosophy. Bran Blanshard, *Reason and Goodness* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1961), 199.

contemporary dismissal of practical demands to live a certain kind of life from philosophy. If we examine contemporary action theory, we can see how something like the emotivist view still functions in the current analytic model. These days, we have gotten so scared and skeptical of anything that is based upon the internal demands of human beings, that the preferred view of action evaluation in contemporary analytic philosophy is one where judgments of actions are to be understood only in terms of their logical or linguistic structure, completely separate from stipulations of the intentions of those actions. Popular examples of this antipsychologistic view of action include Michael Thompson and Candace Vogler, just to name a few.<sup>35</sup> This logic-centric sentiment is derived from the idea that, because Frege was right about how to view logic, we should extend that same antipsychologistic view to human action. The funny thing about such approaches is that more often than not, concrete cases of action evaluations are not even presented. What is presented instead is usually an abstract model of how we are to evaluate all actions objectively, in terms of their structure. Have we really become so scared of psychology in philosophy that we now feel the best explanations of human action can do nothing but treat humans like robots? This seems extremely odd, and extremely counterintuitive. Someone like Nishida would say that somewhere along the line, we have gone drastically wrong with this limited evaluation of human action. And I agree with Nishida here. The assumption that humans should repress their unique claim on the explanation of action is laughable, and lets us know exactly how far to the extreme we have drifted.

The emotivist theory is not the sole example of (C)'s restrictive pressure on the scope of philosophy in contemporary Western discourse. As was suggested popularly by Carnap and

<sup>35</sup> For example, see Michael Thompson's *Life and Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). Also, see Candace Vogler's *Reasonably Vicious* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). Both prefer completely antipsychologistic evaluations of action.

Ayer, (C) also informed a dismissal of disciplines like aesthetics, phenomenology, and theology. Really, any discipline with concepts which cannot be adequately quantified fell victim to the restriction. Certainly all proposed value judgments had to go. These were all explicitly referenced as not being inquiries appropriate for professional philosophy in Carnap and Ayer's attempted eliminations of metaphysics. Unfortunately, we can see how successful the lingering effects of this were with regards to the lack of aesthetics classes now being offered, and the ones being offered usually qualified as "aesthetics of art" or "aesthetics of film".

The repercussions of this theme were all very predictable, as Blanshard explains: "The issue bristles with difficulties, as we shall see. But it is of vast importance, theoretic and practical. It is very important in theory because upon its outcome depends the place we assign to value both in knowledge and in the world."<sup>36</sup> He continues, by addressing specifically which disciplines would change the most:

On the other hand, if value judgments do not express insights or truths, much that has passed as philosophy will have to be dismissed as meaningless. Ethics and aesthetics as traditionally pursued must be abandoned, since the attempt to find what sort of acts are right or wrong will now be recognized as misguided.<sup>37</sup>

Ethics has not been completely abandoned, though the approach is more often than not closer to emotivism than value judgments. Moreover, aesthetics has suffered an unjustifiably tragic fate in the Anglo-American professional philosophical sphere. I think there is much to be learned in the sphere of aesthetics if we consult various Asian philosophical traditions, but our restrictions seem to prevent us from wanting to do that.

Putting the pieces together, (C) is certainly in line with the assumption that a traditional metaphysical view, employing figurative language and poetic appeal, should not determine an ethical view, or practical demands of how to live a happy life. This type of approach would be

<sup>36</sup> Blanshard, *Reason and Goodness*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

one of the most eagerly dismissed from the vision of philosophy proper, given the general restrictions to unscientific theories of reality, ethical value judgments, and emotional or figurative language. Combine the three, and you have, for many, the worst type of philosophy possible. It is humorous, and should come as no surprise given the direction of my paper, that Nishida does all three. Nishida often derives philosophical insight from the profound poetry of Goethe, and references religious texts of all sorts. Moreover, he is fully comfortable talking about value judgments of conduct, and explaining the proper understanding of these value judgments, which I will say more on later.

In sum, the humanistic aspect of philosophy has been generally repressed in the Anglo-American contemporary model. This is due to what Nishida called a prioritization of 'knowledge', and what Blanshard describes as the drastic changes the foundational themes of analytic philosophy make to the ways in which philosophy proper ought or ought not to be pursued. They were both on to a significant change, and they were both correct in their own way as far as some of the negative consequences of the phenomenon under discussion. Blanshard's next elaboration can depict some of these consequences:

This conception of the philosopher's business, if it prevails, is bound to be followed by large changes in the position and influence of his discipline. The level of intellectual acuteness of those engaged in it may well rise. It will become a specialist's province, inviting to those with exceptional powers in logic, conceptual analysis, and theories of knowledge, but unattractive and even repellent to most others. Its appeal will be ascetically intellectual. Many of those who under other circumstances have thought of themselves as philosophic specialists will be excluded from this inner circle of specialism. Those who thought of philosophy less as the analysis of scientific terms than as the synthesis of scientific results, those who looked to it for illumination of the *summum bonum* or of 'man's place in the cosmos', still more those philosophers who, like Sir. Thomas Browne, conceive it as the ascent of a mount for vision, will go elsewhere for their food, to literature perhaps, or to religion. Will this be a loss? I can only think it will.<sup>38</sup>

While Blanshard wrote *Reason and Analysis* in 1962, the amazing thing is that we can see in the present day how correct his predictions were. I can attest to this personally, as I am the

<sup>38</sup> Bran Blanshard, *Reason and Analysis*, 97.

very type of philosopher that the profession may lose, as are many of my friends I have met along the way of my philosophical development. But this appeal is not necessary. Neither is the way we evaluate philosophy programs which tends to generally only even recognize analytic programs as top schools. To best vindicate Blanshard's prediction, we can look to more concrete examples of professional philosophers who share the same general description of affairs: that the sharpening of logically technical skills is generally accompanied by a repression of humanistic concerns in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. Be becoming increasingly analytical, it seems it has become hard for us to be anything but analytical. Perspective is essentially being thwarted by analysis. In David McNaughton's essay "Why Is So Much Philosophy So Tedious?" (2009), he describes the problem very well:

the best philosophy (especially in my own subjects, ethics and the philosophy of religion) is enriched by a wide, reflective, and imaginative experience of literature, politics, art, and science.

Good people are being driven out of the profession by this ethos. Here is the testimony of one philosopher, David Garrard, whose work I have been familiar with from the time I was an undergraduate. His writing was profound, vivid, and exciting as any I have seen from a young philosopher. After graduate work at Oxford, he reluctantly decided in that academic philosophy was not for him. I asked him to tell me why. Here is his very telling reply:

I suppose I felt that in Oxford at least (a) the ethics-aesthetics end of the subject tended to be seen as a bit second-rate, something you'd only do if you didn't have the mental agility to cope with logic & language or metaphysics & epistemology, and that (b) people's sense of what philosophy was for and how it should be conducted relied heavily on a highly technical, non-humanistic, mathy-sciency model: "This is a problem solving discipline; here are the problems, here are the sub-problems, here are the sub-sub-problems; our task is to find a cut-and-dried solution that will resolve as many as possible of the problems all at once, or else to tweak our understanding of some set of problems in such a way that a cut-and-dried solution becomes available."

...It would be all right if the cut-and-dried approach to the subject were just understood as one among others, but while the culture among the graduate students could be enormously intellectually stimulating, you either played the game by those rules or missed out. Bits of extra philosophical discourse were allowed in only in order to be broken down into logical atoms and reconstructed in some technically acceptable form, and attempts to insist in a "literary" way on the irreducible this-ness or that-ness of some aspect of experience, or on the pursuit of wisdom rather than analytical insight, tended to be seen as a little embarrassing and pretentious. If your whole philosophical project was clearly of that kind, you certainly weren't ostracized, but you might well be regarded with a certain vague pity as someone who'd given up their chance of making a contribution to the subject. Also as someone who'd never get a job- but don't get me *started* on

who-refereed-whose-paper philosophical careerism!<sup>39</sup>

In my experience, this accurately reflects the sad view of philosophy proper in the most politically powerful and respected programs these days. Put simply, the contemporary model has prioritized the theoretical so much and become so immersed in the trees, that most graduate students in philosophy can no longer even see the forest. The preferred methodology does enable clever students to be able to demonstrate these skills with precision, and this is seen as a plus. However, as Garrard explains, often times these demonstrations of skill, especially in the realm of ethics, seem more like insincere steps towards intellectual power and respect than sincere convictions on the matter. This, however, is not a critique of the character of analytic philosophers. This is simply an acknowledgment of the lack of sincerity inherent in our current model. If what gets people published these days is pretending to believe a given view, so be it. But this is not my philosophical perspective. The restrictive elements of the foundational analytic model, coupled with the political implications of these themes still being prevalent, makes most question whether or not the forest is even worth considering if one is to be a professional philosopher. In other words, approaches that look to take personal value from philosophy, reflect on that value, and be open to applying that insight to our every-day lives, are now generally viewed as an antiquated, unprofessional perspective, and no longer for academic philosophy. As Nishida described, knowledge is being entirely separated from our practical applications of it.

Therefore, when a student who has a negative or dismissive initial attitude towards philosophy, or who has only seen philosophy only from the analytic-scientific presentation, asks why they should study philosophy, it is much harder for us to respond than many of us would

<sup>39</sup> David McNaughton, "Why Is So Much Philosophy So Tedious?" *Florida Philosophical Review*, Volume IX, Issue 1 (Spring 2009), 7-8.

have initially assumed. This is because it is harder for many philosophers to justify their initial sentiment that they receive real intrinsic value from philosophy, or that it makes them happy, when the preferred methodology of professional philosophy generally contradicts that perspective. The profound has been fully replaced by the logical and scientific. Perhaps this is simply the bitter words of a misplaced poet, but it seems to many to be a real description of the restrictive nature of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy in the most politically powerful institutions, coming up time and time again in various respected professional philosophers' reports on the matter. This phenomenon pervades the classroom, in material as much as approach, as students who were once enthusiastic of the more humanistic approaches to philosophy begin to feel that professional philosophy is not for them. The interests and methods that many interested in the humanistic aspect wish to employ are simply not given their due respect in the current predominant model. Professional philosophy has become gradually less open minded to such approaches, and this is unfortunate, for both philosophy as a whole, and the individuals interested in it.

Aside from just a general suppression of humanistic concerns, there is a very specific type of philosophical approach that the current model does not allow. This is of course the view that philosophy can function as a type of ultimate therapy. Recall again the ancient perspectives presented in Section II. The common thread among all of them is that human happiness was an immensely important feature of the respective philosophy. Moreover, in each approach, true happiness was not equated with mere pleasure or pain. There are still many today that hold this type of view, but it has been so far removed from academic philosophy in the contemporary Anglo-American model that it may do more harm than good to even attempt to equate the two approaches as both being philosophy. Perhaps the most relevant discussion on this was



presented by Swami Agehananda Bharati, former widely respected anthropology professor, who in his later years turned to a life of ascetic monasticism. Bharati's specialization was Sanskrit and South Asian religions. He has published countless books and articles on these subjects. Interestingly, Bharati was also very knowledgeable regarding the analytic tradition and its method. Here is a reconstruction of three particularly interesting points that Bharati made at a lecture given at Ambedkar Open University Hyderabad:

(1) Contemporary analytic philosophy's focus is not primarily to solve problems; rather, it is to dissolve them. These problems are analyzed in terms of proper linguistic usage. The fundamental insight of *Darshan* (referring to the Indian religio-philosophical tradition) is not at all attempting the same thing, and translates closer to "sight" or "vision". This sight or vision refers to a type of metaphysical realization of a supreme truth, but unquestionably does not provide the degree of intellectual clarity that contemporary (analytic) philosophy aims for. While there was indeed plenty of logic and epistemology prevalent within the Indian religio-philosophical tradition, it was never the forefront of concern. In this regard, systems of thought that could in fact be equivocated with modern philosophy were indeed prevalent in India, and very much a part of much religious thought after the *Upanishads*, but *Darshan* itself is something completely different. For example, the *Upanishads*, understood in modern western terms, should not be called philosophy, if we are to assume philosophy refers to the skills of argumentation and conceptual analysis (as is given in the modern dictionary).

(2) This being said, what *Darshan* does offer that the analytic tradition unquestionably does not is a type of philosophical therapy. This is entirely different from the Western notion of psychological or psychiatric therapy via professional help, which only pertains to people who are deemed 'sick'. This type of therapy is intimately connected with a metaphysical view, but the metaphysical view is not placed on the same bar as science, and should not be. Things which are placed with the bar of science can be empirically falsifiable. The fundamental concepts of *Darshan* are not meant to be falsifiable in theory, but they are certainly meant to provide general therapy for suffering in life.

(3) What can however be empirically validated is the practical application of yogic instruction, based on whether or not it works for the person using it. Aside from this, if someone wants to claim knowledge of science, logic, or epistemology, they need to go out and study science, logic, and epistemology.<sup>40</sup>

This suggests a couple of things. First, the practical emphasis of self-cultivation I suggest has been dismissed by the analytic tradition has in fact been dismissed, according to Bharati. The same problem was foreshadowed by Nishida and Blanshard, and confirmed in

<sup>40</sup> Agehananda Bharati (M N Roy Centenary Memorial Lecture at Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad, 1987) The lecture is available for access via: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=231Dbe59bPw>. These are just a few of the central concerns Bharati takes up in his four part discussion.

modern times by David McNaughton, and as we will soon see, Joel Kupperman. For those who take this problem seriously, the repression of humanistic concerns in contemporary analytic philosophy has more or less reached a consensus. By now it should be clearer that the reason such approaches are now being generally repressed is simply that this is not what analytic philosophy is trying to do, and the general analytic method is still the preferred methodology for academic philosophy in the Anglo-American world.

In the end one's definition of philosophy is going to be relative to what one thinks philosophy should accomplish. Bharati was correct, in that, if the definition of philosophy we employ is the one in the modern dictionary, self-cultivation or self-purification is conspicuously absent. But should this very absence be taken as proof of the sentiment's validity? No it should not. All that this means is that the modern dictionary reflects exactly how big the problem is. The absence is simply a reflection of the professionalization of academic philosophy, which has continued to dichotomize itself from more humanistic oriented approaches. However, we may need topics like self-cultivation in professional philosophy now more than ever.

Self-cultivation, however, is not the only type of approach missed by the analytic tradition. There are other drastically different interpretations of ethics that are also ignored due to a restrictive view of professional philosophy. For example, what do we have in contemporary Western ethics that seeks to establish a basis for wisdom? Do we even believe in wisdom? Is there a difference between wisdom and knowledge? How do we cultivate wisdom? We can see adequate accounts of similar important questions with the works of Aristotle and Hume, but aside from this, these questions are all but ignored. Should ethical discourse be carried out in a uniform, unambiguous way, or should it be flexible to poetic imagery and metaphor? Should we be more comfortable integrating internal human demands in ethics than we currently are? These

are but a few examples. As Kupperman acknowledges, various Asian philosophies can often provide contemporary Western discourse with drastically different philosophical approaches to construct new views from than what is commonly assumed. But we will never work towards this type of understanding if we remain closed off to such approaches.

Kupperman does a great job of establishing this in his book *Learning from Asian Philosophy*. There he asserts that it is not that Asian philosophies simply provide different answers to the same questions (as is the common assumption), but often times, they ask entirely different questions altogether. The value of these philosophies, propounded by thinkers of equal intelligence and sincerity, can be measured in both their provision of philosophy, and even the recognition of new problems altogether. Kupperman mentions six different fundamental problems as addressed by Asian traditions that look entirely different than they do from the lens of contemporary Western philosophy:

1. The formation of self is considered as an ethical problem. In many Asian traditions, how it is that one becomes the kind of person who leads a good life is regarded as the central problem of ethics. Contemporary Western philosophy gives it comparatively little attention.

2. Related to this is the fluidity of self and the problem how it can be consistent with a stable persona. There are suggestive lines of thought in the early philosophy of Sartre and in postmodernism. But there is nothing in Western philosophy comparable to the sophisticated, and itself fluid, treatment in the great texts of Daoism.

3. The scope of ethics is itself a problem. Is it concerned only with our choices, or are their things that are not matters of choice that also should be important in ethics? Confucius in particular has been read as discounting the phenomenon of choice as an ethical topic. What is it to have a genuine choice? Are there matters not of genuine choice for which an agent nevertheless can be assigned ethical merit (or lack of merit)?

4. Is the scope of ethics broad enough to include all or almost all of life? Is it concerned with quality of life at moments at which we are not making major choices? If so, are all parts of life governed in some uniform or integrated way? Or are different parts subject to ethical review in different ways? As a familiar alternative: is ethics primarily concerned only with certain especially important or problematic moments in life?

5. There is also the question of whether the demands of ethics fall on all (at least, all who are mature and of sound mind, etc.) alike, or whether there can be sliding scales of ethical requirements. In many cultures religious vocation is held to create higher standards. But in some Asian traditions there is a sense that, even if we put to the side any considerations that we would normally think of as religious, ethics imposes higher standards on some people than others.

6. Finally, there is the function of philosophy itself. Is it a search for truth? And if so, what kind of truth? Occasionally Asian philosophy is dismissed as “wisdom literature” rather than genuine philosophy. It is natural to ask what connection, if any, philosophy can have with wisdom.

Related to this is the question of how philosophy communicates (when it does) and what counts as really effective communication.<sup>41</sup>

These are but some of the general themes often missed by contemporary Western philosophy. In the next section we will look to see how Nishida himself treats some of these issues.

In sum, there are certain foundational pillars of analytic thought which suppress approaches emphasizing self-cultivation from philosophy proper. These foundational themes, though established years before the fall of logical positivism, logical atomism, and ordinary language philosophy, still remain, for the most part, authoritative. We see examples of this with published material, past and present, and with personal accounts. Aside from a reinvigorated leniency towards current metaphysical problems, (most still in accordance with the preferred methodology) the themes generally still function as perceived quality checks for philosophy proper. Add to this our general view of professional psychology and psychiatry in the contemporary West, and we have a severe restriction of making theoretical and practical demands harmonious with one another in professional philosophy.

<sup>41</sup> Joel Kupperman, *Learning from Asian Philosophy*, 3-4.

## SECTION 4 NISHIDA'S ENERGETISM

The last section presented contemporary analytic Anglo-American philosophy as being restrictive with regards to the humanistic concern of self-cultivation. Nishida will be my exemplar of an approach that looks to bridge the East-West gap, and he will also provide the test of my judgment of analytic philosophy as being overly restrictive for our ultimate human ends. By looking to some of his now antiquated philosophical methods, and seeing how different his approach was than the contemporary Western analytic model we can begin to evaluate some of respective implications of the aforementioned approaches.

The natural progression of Nishida's project led him from a serious consideration of what constitutes true reality, to a serious consideration of how we ought to view and live our lives. For Nishida, the shift from theoretical to practical was far more serious and inevitable than the contemporary analytic dismissal allows for. In a somewhat Kierkegaardian fashion, he felt that all who become truly serious about the most profound truths in life must seek these types of practical demands to live a certain life. He obviously bases this on his own theory of reality, so in order to fully understand his views about how we should view and live our lives, it is first necessary to summarize Nishida's view of reality in depth. Nishida's overall philosophical method in *An Inquiry into the Good* was foundationalist, with an emphasis on the phenomena of consciousness. Consider this elaboration in *The Starting Point of the Inquiry*:

To understand true reality and to know the true nature of the universe and human life, we must discard all artificial assumptions, doubt whatever can be doubted, and proceed on the basis of direct and indubitable knowledge. From the perspective of common sense, we think that things exist in the external world apart from consciousness and that in the back of consciousness there is something called the mind, which performs various functions. Our assumption that mind and matter exist independently constitutes the basis of our conduct and is itself based on the demands imposed by our thinking. This assumption leaves much room for doubt. Science, which does not take the most profound explanation of reality as its goal, is constructed on such hypothetical knowledge. But insufficiently critical thinking is also found in philosophy, which does take that explanation as its goal. Many philosophers base their thinking on existing assumptions and hence fail to engage in penetrating doubt. (38)

The fundamental difference between Nishida and the standard analytic approach should be obvious. First, the ideal for philosophical knowledge in the analytic tradition--the explanations given by physical science--are viewed by Nishida as not critical enough for the standard of philosophy, which seeks the most *profound* explanation as its goal. Recall again (A): the loyalty to science over philosophical speculation, and my main criticism of it. It seems to shut off more philosophy than it allows, and it follows only pre-existing assumptions. This is unacceptable to Nishida, because philosophy needs to be met with "penetrating doubt." If all we are doing is accepting popular cut-and-dried answers and clarifying, we are doing little to truly advance understanding.

Nishida held firm to this conviction that true knowledge which is absolutely indubitable can only be accessed via the direct facts of experience. Yet this is not experience impeded by discriminative judgment and analysis from which knowledge is then formed. Rather, this is a state of active intuition, where subject and object are not divided. It is from this state only, the state of 'pure experience', where questions of error are simply nonsensical, that we should construct our philosophy views from. Thus, Nishida thought both Bacon and Descartes proposed an admirable foundational epistemological method, but failed because of their attempt to venture outside the facts of direct experience.

John Maraldo points out in "Nishida Kitarō" that Nishida's approach was groundbreaking for modern epistemology. As he explains, it challenged two very established assumptions: "the assumptions that experience is individual and subjective, and that it leads to knowledge only via a corrective process with input from the mind or other individuals."<sup>42</sup> This prioritization of experience, Maraldo explains, was very much in line with "Husserl's phenomenology and William James' radical empiricism."<sup>43</sup>

In his *Inquiry*, Nishida believed the intuition of facts in consciousness should be the proper starting point of all philosophical inquiry, not an abstract form of thinking prioritizing the *noumenal*. In turn, Nishida rejects the dualistic dichotomy of mind and matter, the standard philosophical position in Western philosophy at the time (1911). He thought that this preference on abstract thinking occurred so much in his time because many philosophers had not only assumed this artificial dichotomy, but that they had also, in light of the dichotomy, prioritized thinking as accessing the *noumenal* realm; the realm that Nishida thought we simply cannot access.

For Nishida, it is not that we cannot access noumena because we have limited capacities. We cannot know *noumena* because there is no *noumenal* realm, but even if there were, he thinks, the belief that we could access it is bizarre. He demonstrates this point with a *reductio* that deserves explanation. First, let us go ahead and assume the *noumenal* realm, which is intended to be outside the phenomena of consciousness. A serious problem then emerges. The given assumption is that a trans-experiential reality exists, but we are then assuming that within our phenomena of consciousness, we can somehow access this realm. This seems extremely odd.

<sup>42</sup> Maraldo, John C., "Nishida Kitarō," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed. (Stanford: The Metaphysics Research Lab Center for the Study of Language and Information, 2012). <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/nishida-kitaro/>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Nishida suggests we should either: (A), assume the trans-experiential reality and accept the limitations of our thinking as establishing we cannot access *noumena*, or (B), reject *noumena* altogether as he did. With option (B), the phenomena of consciousness are taken as 'sole reality.' All other *noumenal* explanations are perhaps useful for human purposes, but in essence, mere abstractions imposed by the demands of human thought. Trying to venture outside the phenomena of consciousness by the activity of a phenomenon of consciousness proves highly problematic. The only way to do so, it would seem, would be an approach that *assumed* a number of things, or described some transcendental way to access the *noumenal* realm.

This is again very different than the standard contemporary analytic view, where descriptions of *noumena* are often taken for granted and seen as objective facts. For Nishida, all descriptions of *noumena* may be close to being an accurate reflection of reality, but we never truly know them, philosophically speaking. Moreover, such attempts usually depict reality as independent from the subjective aspect of all phenomena of consciousnesses, but independence is problematic for Nishida, because reality consists of the phenomena of consciousness, it is not separate from them. He thinks we should drop all of our baggage of assumptions on the way things are completely independent of our phenomena of consciousness, and simply pause and reflect about what we are really doing when we attempt to venture outside the phenomena of consciousness.

This line of thinking may come across very antiquated or unscientific to analytic philosophers eager to tackle the Kantian subjectivism, until some of us really give the point serious reflection. Often times we get so stuck in intense analysis that we fail to see the more fundamental explanations of what we are all *really* doing here. And what we are doing when we refer to *noumena* is indeed an abstraction. Few people are willing to accept this though. Some



of us may agree with some aspects of this point, and go the Russellian route of admitting we cannot know *noumena* directly, but that we can know their overall structural features, but this is only a matter of choice. Moreover, when we do this, we are not engaging in "penetrating doubt" to the fullest. We are accepting a number of pre-existing maxims to construct our theories from, which, for Nishida, is okay for physical science, but not for philosophy. Moreover, referencing current theories of physics or now empirical observations of our universe does not defeat Kant's claim, it only begs his question.

Nishida's critique of *noumena* extends to the arbitrary dichotomy between thinking and intuiting, as both are simply variations of facts of consciousness. He thought that when we reflect on the various activities of consciousness we see that there is no truly passive activity, although most assume intuition to be passive in nature and thinking to be active in nature. Yet intuition, Nishida says, is not entirely passive, nor is it simply the presence of a simple sensation. Instead Nishida considers it as a 'direct judgment', which is thought to be the only true access to the 'unifying reality' behind the most fundamental aspect of our thinking. He felt this intuitive check operates at the base of all thinking, even something like the operations of mathematics. Therefore, because it is free from any arbitrary assumptions, Nishida takes intuition as his starting point. He prioritizes 'active intuition' over abstract thought as most fundamental.

On the view under consideration, the *noumena* are simply abstractions created to aid the human thought process to "systematically organize the facts of direct experience" (42). Clearly the *a priori* driven rationalist approaches are at odds with how Nishida conducted philosophy. But Nishida insists he should not to be confused with Berkeleyian idealism, a common misunderstanding of his views expressed in *An Inquiry into the Good*. Here is his own elaboration on this point, which shows his view to be far more like a Jamesian neutral monism

than a Berkeleyian idealism, though he admittedly derives influence from both, which only adds to the confusion for readers unfamiliar with Nishida:

I want to make clear, by “phenomena of consciousness”, I do not mean to imply that the only thing that exists is “mind”, which is a separate thing from matter. What I am saying is this: true reality is not either. It is not simply a material phenomenon, nor is it simply a phenomenon of consciousness. “Even “Esse est percipi” diverges from my view. (44)

Part of the confusion when it comes to Western readers interpreting Nishida is that he simply pulls from so many different positions that any attempts to label his work based on one recognizable feature tends to ignore the nuances, intricacies, and flexibility of Nishidian thought. On the same point, his willingness to do this is yet another thing that makes his approach now drastically different than the standard contemporary Western analytic approach.

To elaborate on this, Nishida develops his theory of reality as being informed by his notion of 'pure experience', which he explains exhibits "no opposition between subject and object and no separation of knowledge, feeling, and volition; there is only an independent, self-sufficient, pure activity" (47). The distinction is just another opposition that arises from the demands of human thinking. As such it is not truly supported by the facts of direct experience. Subject and object, for Nishida, are derived from two different ways of looking at the same fact. James and Nishida are similar in their views of 'pure experience', though the two accounts possess fundamental differences.<sup>44</sup> As previewed in section II, Nishida's 'pure experience' can be best understood in terms of his Zen background, coupled with his knowledge of James's *neutral monism*. Again, Buddhism helps to inform the foundational aspects of Nishida's thought, yet it rarely acts as his sole philosophical justification.

<sup>44</sup> For a great account of both philosophers' conceptions of pure experience, see David Dilworth, "Initial Formations of Pure Experience in Nishida Kitarō and William James," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 24, No. ½ (1969), 93-111. <http://0-www.jstor.org.umiss.lib.olemiss.edu/stable/2383764> (accessed January 31, 2013).

The concept of 'pure experience' was an immensely important and distinctive foundational feature of Nishida's *Inquiry*. Even with his initial work he described the state of 'pure experience' through the notion of 'active intuition'. But the pre-reflective act of 'pure experience' embodied by a human being should not be understood as simply not thinking. The aim here is something far more perceptive, fluid, spontaneous, and creative, as Nishida describes:

The present of pure experience is not the present in thought, for once one thinks about the present, it is no longer present. In the present as a fact of consciousness there must be some temporal duration. The focus of consciousness is at all times the present, and the sphere of pure experience coincides with the sphere of attention. But the sphere of pure experience is not necessarily limited to a single focus of attention. Without adding the least bit of thought, we can shift our attention within the state where subject and object have not yet separated. For example, a climber's determined ascent of a cliff and a musician's performance of a piece that has been mastered through practice are examples of what G.F. Stout calls a "perceptual train." Such a mental state may accompany the instinctual behaviors of animals as well.

In these mental phenomena, perception maintains a strict unity and connectedness; when consciousness moves from one thing to the next, attention is always directed toward the things perceived and each act gives rise to the next without the slightest crack between them for thinking to enter. (6)

Many have dismissed Nishida's earlier conceptions of 'pure experience' in favor of his later articulated versions of it, because many contemporary scholars suggest a psychologistic underpinning of the concept in his preferred language in the *Inquiry*. But nearly all scholars recognize the fact that--as Nishida later explained--his initial conceptions of 'pure experience' in large helped to fuel his later projects, which are generally viewed by the same critics as highly successful. Joel Krueger mimics this perspective by pointing to another way in which Nishida's 'pure experience' can be best represented by the foundational insight of Dōgen, especially his later elaborations of it:

Nishida's later formulation of the concept "acting-intuition" is his attempt to depsychologize pure experience and avoid these difficulties. With "acting-intuition", Nishida makes a move anticipated by Dōgen: that is, he situates pure experience at the prereflective level of the acting, world-engaged body. Doing so, Nishida believes, overcomes the two deficiencies of his early formulation of pure experience referenced above. Additionally, by taking pure experience down to the level of the body, Nishida discovers the phenomenological resources to articulate more adequately how pure experience—via acting-intuition—is *cultivated*. And as Yuasa (1987) points out, this

move very much reflects Nishida's eastern philosophical and religious heritage—of which Dōgen is a powerful representative—which insists that “true knowledge cannot be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking, but only through “bodily recognition or realization” (Jap: *tainin* or *taikoku*), that is, through the utilization of one's total mind and body” (25). In short, pure experience in the later Nishida—along side its companion concept, “acting-intuition”—becomes a robust *bodily* phenomenon. Sensorimotor dynamics secure our nondual relation with the world. Therefore, via acting-intuition, the acting body for Nishida becomes the place (Jap: *basho*) where pure experience is realized—or, to use a term introduced in prior chapters, *enacted*.<sup>45</sup>

With Nishida's mature philosophy, self-cultivation through bodily perfection was an increasingly important notion. He never gave up on the fundamental idea--shared with Dōgen--that mere theoretical knowledge, detached from the emphasis of perfected human action, should not exhaust our philosophical intentions. This is a highly distinctive feature of Nishida's work. Despite the lack of presentation of this type of idea in analytic philosophy, this is a practical human concern that many new students of philosophy may be interested in considering, if they only knew philosophy could be directed towards such ends.

Recall again restriction (C) of the analysts: the aversion to emotive, poetic, or speculative philosophical approaches. Another fundamental difference from the current Western analytic model, regarding his *Inquiry* specifically, is that Nishida thought that we all as philosophers want to reference the objective world as the focal point for pure knowledge, but the truth of the matter is that the objective world cannot escape its relation to our will and feelings. This is one reason Nishida felt the gifted poet better captured reality than the scientist did, challenging yet again the assumption that the physical scientific model is the best, much less, the only model, on which to base philosophy.

Nishida also calls into question the assumption that experience is necessarily subjective, and moreover, that it should not be given the same rigorous standard as formal logic. John

<sup>45</sup> Joel Krueger, "William James and Kitaro Nishida on "Pure Experience", Consciousness, and Moral Psychology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 2007), 114-115.

Maraldo has pointed this out:

We may understand his philosophical project overall as an attempt to restore to experience and consciousness the rigor, necessity and universality accorded to logic. This project developed in a direction quite opposite to that of psychologism, which would reduce logic to the contingencies of the individual mind or brain. It also differed from efforts to establish pure logic as a self-explanatory realm in that Nishida insisted on the starting point of experience, a priority he shared with Husserl's phenomenology and William James' radical empiricism. We might characterize his philosophy in general as a phenomenological metaphysics or an ontology of logical forms, but with one qualification: although he proposed a unitary source of such forms, that source is neither exclusionary nor positive; in other words the source itself cannot be described monistically as a single, more basic form or thing. Nishida eventually called this source *MU* (nothingness), a notion he found particularly prominent in the traditions of the East.<sup>46</sup>

Once again, here we see a drastically different approach to philosophy that would most likely have been never taken seriously, given the restrictive pillars of contemporary analytic thought. But for Nishida, to fully account for reality, we must satisfy not only intellectual demands, but also demands of the feeling and the will. In fact, the latter is viewed as most fundamental.

In comparison to what types of knowledge pillars (A), (B), and (C) shoot for, we can see a fundamental difference in emphasis. Nishida favors humanistic concerns, which appeal more to the human condition than detached 'objective knowledge' of the world. Since an enthusiasm for empirical insight is a hallmark of analytic philosophy, it is interesting to see how Nishida opens up intellectual space on its terms. He challenges the common assumption that humanistic concerns have to be rooted in weak speculation, rather than empirical insight. Understood a certain way, he thought that increased knowledge of the human condition was the best way to access true reality.

He elaborates on this, by explaining how we can capture 'pure experience':

We must realize the true state of this reality with our entire being rather than reflect on it, analyze it, or express it in words....True reality, like the true meaning of art, is not something that can be transmitted from one person to another. All we can transmit is an abstract shell. (51)

While there is only one true reality, Nishida explains how it comes to us via various perspectives.

<sup>46</sup> Maraldo, "Nishida Kitarō," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

This variation is an inevitable aspect of human life. So there is a problem with the scientific view that assumes nature as independent from the subjective, unifying aspect of thought. The laws of nature are established through induction, and "are simply assumptions that because two phenomena arise in an unchanging succession, one is the cause of the other. No matter how far the natural sciences develop, we obtain no deeper explanation than this one, which becomes ever more detailed and encompassing" (51). To illustrate this, he creates an elaborate *reductio*, which I have reconstructed:

The current trend in science is to strive for objectivity. Because of this, the following explanations are given for the following various phenomena: [the psychological → physiologically], [the physiological → chemically], [the chemical → physically], [the physical → mechanically]. But what is the purely mechanical perspective at the base of the solution? First of all, pure matter (i.e. matter free from the phenomena of consciousness) is something we can never really experience, but let us assume that we could, at least to a certain respect. In this case, what is presented must necessarily be a phenomenon of consciousness. But things that are phenomena of consciousness must be also subjective, not purely objective. Moreover, since this pure matter would have no qualities from which to access, it would possess only quantitative features, which are by themselves abstract concepts. (69)

Thus, for Nishida, nature as we experience it is never an abstract concept, or mere mechanical energy. Animals, plants, and materials are all concrete facts of experience, and they all possess distinct significance and characteristics of their own. All things have their respective individuality. We can explain all this away in various ways, but the intuitive facts given in our direct experiences in the world cannot be fundamentally altered. He explains how even in the mechanic-scientific explanations, the teleological development of all organisms from the potential power of an egg or seed--also very much corresponds to the perspectival unity of nature. Thus, he felt we need not view this 'unifying power' as being at odds with scientific explanations of mechanical energy, but instead we should view them as complements of one another.

He asks us to consider a bronze statue. It is not simply a lump of bronze, nor is it simply an expression of ideals. The 'unifying activity' corresponds to the 'ideals' or 'will' of the things creating it, while the chemical and physical laws correspond to the materials. The result is

'willed action'. This 'unifying power' is not simply an abstract concept; it is the way things are presented to us upon active intuition, as he further elaborates:

When we see our favorite flower or pet animal, we immediately grasp a certain unifying reality in the whole. This reality is the thing's self, its fundamental nature or *noumenon*. Artists are people who most excel in this kind of intuition. They discern at a glance the truth of a thing and grasp its unifying reality. What they then express is not a superficial fact but an unchanging noumenal reality hidden deep within things. (71)

As mentioned, Nishida conceives of this 'unifying power' as being the driving force behind all of reality, not just the consciousness of human beings. It is from here on that we begin to see clearly his teleological view of the world, and his view of *spirit* as being immanent in nature. Since true nature transcends the subject/object distinction, this 'unifying power' is not separate from active consciousness; rather, it is fundamentally the same activity, being expressed by all things in nature. As these features enhance with an individual human consciousness, one becomes increasingly able to comprehend nature and its significance.

To avoid confusion, Nishida elaborates what he means by *spirit*.<sup>47</sup> His main point is that most people opposed to the notion of spirit in the world assume it is some separate thing outside of nature; an unjustifiable, counterintuitive imaginary concept. Many people assume an objective nature, independent of spirit. From 'pure experience'; even from the nature that most of us truly experience, natural phenomena is not separate from phenomena of consciousness and subjectivity. Rather, natural phenomena *are* phenomena of consciousness and subjectivity, which again, is established by the 'unity of consciousness', a 'subjective unity'. What Nishida means by saying natural phenomena are given to us via this 'subjective unity', the phenomena of consciousness, is that considered from the human perspective, nature is presented to us as a 'subjective unity' of our senses. Still, again, it does not follow from this that the world is *only* our

<sup>47</sup> The translators' footnote reads "The Japanese term *seishin*, rendered here as "spirit," is roughly equivalent to the German term *Geist* and therefore might be rendered "mind" or "psyche". Due to the religious connotations of *seishin* found later in this work, we have translated it as "spirit" (73).

ideas, or only *our* world is real. Solipsism was a non-starter for Nishida, because experience precedes the individual. Thus, for Nishida, *spirit* and nature are simply two ways of describing the same reality, but spirit was a recognizable feature *of* reality.

Thus, Nishida says, when contradiction or conflict is present, so too is spirit. The unifying activity, or *spirit*, is "conscious of itself not when that unity is functioning, but when there is conflict" (75). He thinks his point can be realized in light of the sense that ideals accompany *spirit*, and represent a conflict with 'actuality'. Therefore he concludes that with *spirit* there is always some type of struggle, which is why he says "the claim of pessimists that our world is characterized by suffering contains an element of truth" (75). But it is from this opposition, he thinks, that a greater unity can be achieved.

Nishida extends *spirit* to all things, living and non-living. He wants us to consider a tree. While things like humans and animals possess what he calls an 'internal unity of the self', things like trees do not. Trees are not conscious of themselves, but they do possess a consciousness of sorts, which is expressed through *spirit*. They too are still unified, but only from the outside. This replaces the standard assumption that a view of reality derived only from the phenomena of consciousness means that things that are outside of a human consciousness seemingly do not exist. Again, Nishida makes clear in his *Inquiry* that his view is neither solipsistic nor idealistic, as experience, for Nishida, preceded the individual, not the other way around. Considered as a whole, all of experience possesses a consciousness of sorts. Nishida would in his later works venture past the 'phenomena of consciousness' language and establish a more logical articulation with his concept of *basho* (place), thus satisfying his own criticism and the criticism of others that his initial work came off too psychological.



To further elaborate on his notion of *spirit*, Nishida appeals to modern evolutionary theory which states the following relationship occurs regarding evolutionary development:

Modern evolutionary theory contends that evolution proceeds from inorganic matter to plants, then to animals, and finally to human beings. This theory indicates that reality gradually expresses its hidden essence as actuality. It is only in the development of spirit that the fundamental character of the establishment of reality appears. As Leibniz said, evolution is involution. (76)

In the end, for Nishida, "Our self, as the unifier of spirit, is also the fundamental unifying activity of reality" (76).

Let us keep in mind again (B): the general aversion to religious metaphysics. Nishida's view of God, which is essentially the same as his elaborations on spirit, provides yet another counter to the assumption that religious philosophy must necessarily be unempirical or unscientific. He actually thought that most conceptions of God, and nearly all attempts at a proof of God, ultimately fail. The arguments from causality, the design argument, the Kantian approach-- Nishida thought they all failed miserably. They fail because they attempt to argue for the nature of a transcendent deity indirectly, thus free from the facts of experience. He refers to the common view of an anthropomorphized human-like deity as "extremely infantile and it not only conflicts with present-day learning and knowledge but in the religious sphere falls short of being something with which we humans can achieve intimate unity in our hearts" (80). Still, his view does not cohere with strict materialism either, as the above depiction of *spirit* shows. As touched on earlier, he felt that the fundamental spiritual principle at the base of reality is obvious upon reflection, which accords with the basic foundational truth of the Indian religious-philosophical tradition: "Atman and Brahman are identical. God is the great spirit of the universe" (80).

As Nishida says, his God "is no-thing, there is no place where God is not, and no place where God does not function" (82). However, he explains how only those willing and prepared

to see God will. Untrained students cannot grasp advanced mathematical principles, inexperienced viewers of art cannot appreciate beauty, and people unwilling and unready to see God can and will not grasp this. Yet those willing and prepared feel this power directly. There is no question such an approach would be easily dismissed by the analytic tradition, as his explanations of God are often poetic, and of course, he is appealing to a religious insight which is generally not allowed.

But the assumption in contemporary analytic philosophy is usually that religious insight and modern science must necessarily clash. Viewing religion as separate from science was, after all, one of the major motivations of the logical positivist movement, with a view of philosophy governed by physics on one side, and speculative religion on the other side. In fairness, the foundations of monotheism in the West more often than not do lead to clashes with modern science (i.e. evolution vs. creationism) as Nishida suggested, but this is not the case with Nishida's God. Modern evolution was actually one of the most powerful explanations of his expression of *spirit* and God. The contemporary restriction never really seems to account for views like Nishida's, whose description of *spirit* or God pragmatically takes scientific truths very seriously and is ultimately derived from experience rather than abstract argument.

After reality has been seriously considered and established, it is time to venture to the practical issues. He begins with conduct. Conduct is differentiated from mere physical phenomena by Nishida because it possesses a consciousness; it is goal directed. So, Nishida says, it is different from mere reflex movements, and from what he calls 'instinctive action'. Conduct, then, is human action with a clear goal in mind. We can see it as 'willed action'. So it is important to look at the will. The will arises because as humans we are all constructed to be able to make movements which better promote the development of our life. Consciousness, in its

beginning phase, starts out as mere pain and pleasure--simple reactions to external stimuli. As increased clarity of ideas and the activity of association becomes active, moments begin to shift from unconscious responses to external stimuli to eventual 'willed action'. Thus the will arises.

What, then, determines the direction of movement or association? Nishida eventually deems this 'power of the will', but for now he calls it *motivation*. This motivation needs a goal to be directed to, and this goal is established by experience as a *desire*. When only one desire is present, movements and actions generate without hesitation. When more than one is present, the more powerful of the two takes priority, and movements and actions are generated. Nishida calls this *decision*. All three form the entirety of the will. The will, then, is the essential part to conduct, not the physical action. If the will is present, yet an action is impeded, this should still be considered conduct. If the physical action occurred but the will was not present, it should not be considered conduct. Moreover, by evaluating the will Nishida also concludes that "thinking, imagination, and the will are fundamentally identical unifying activities" (91). Further, only by access to this can we properly judge conduct.

Again, this is a drastically different approach than the contemporary analytic approach to action theory. Given Nishida's system, an evaluation of the structures of actions completely devoid of their intent destroys any possibility for an adequate understanding of human beings and their actions. However, he challenges the common assumption that fuels the repression of psychological evaluations in action, by showing how the will of human beings need not be viewed as a weak or subjective source for knowledge.

To better understand Nishida's conception of the will and its role in establishing reality, it is important to understand that he viewed nature as purposeful, or as "advancing through stages

from individual differentiation to a greater synthesis, thereby displaying its true meaning" (94).

In nature, that which is considered purely mechanically is also an expression of the will:

That which is regarded from the outside as a mere mechanical movement or a process of living phenomena is, in its true internal significance, a statue of a compassionate, perfected Buddha or a brave *deva* king, nature is an expression of the will, and it is through our will that we can grasp the true significance of profound nature. (94)

This inevitably leads Nishida to discuss the so-called "freedom of the will", an expression he considers to be a complete misnomer. To explain, he points out that we often view it this way because in light of a given situation, we could either choose option (1), (2), or (3), and so on. We can either do or not do things, so we appear free to choose, but he thought those who uphold complete freedom of the will must maintain some type of ability to freely pick and choose motives without any cause. This is counterintuitive, because motives need some type of cause, even if not appearing clearly in the phenomena of consciousness.

On the other hand, the strict determinist argument is also highly problematic for Nishida. Here he explains how even if modern science reaches the point of being able to "physically or chemically explain each of the functions of the brain at the base of consciousness" (97), all this would prove is that the material of the brain is not immune to physical laws. It does not prove there is nothing going on beyond the material. So if we consider again the bronze statue, is it immune to physical laws? Surely it is not. Does it also represent something else? Surely it does. Thus either view which allows for only one perspective is flawed. Freedom of the will void of cause and reason is imaginary, and when fully reflected on, more oppressive than free. Agency would carry little or no role in decision. Meanwhile a 'will' or 'spirit', does seem to function at the base of all actions. As Nishida explains, "Consciousness is not free because it functions fortuitously beyond the laws of nature, but rather because it follows its own nature. It is free not

because it functions for no reason, but because it knows well the reasons behind its functioning" (99).

Accordingly, Nishida thinks we can evaluate conduct in terms of cause or reason, or we can investigate it in terms of human goals. "The former represents theoretical inquiry about the laws of the establishment of things, while the latter represents practical inquiry about the laws of the activity of things" (100). Again, pointing to the difference in perspective, Nishida thinks an adequate evaluation of value judgments should be essentially derived from the latter, not the former. He is not satisfied with only studying action in terms of the former. To do so would be to frame value judgments in terms of something more like mere events than intentional actions, and this takes away the special significance of human beings.

It is from this sentiment that Nishida points out the many insufficiencies of all 'heteronomous' theories of ethics. They all essentially attempt to frame ethics in terms of a source that is transcendent of the internal demands of human beings. On this view, the demands of human beings seem meaningless, as he explains, "In the framework of the authority theory, we cannot explain moral motives, and the so-called moral law is nearly meaningless; as a result, the distinction between good and evil loses any possible standard" (109).

Nishida also treats the class of autonomous theories, which he breaks into three separate groups: "the first, based on reason, is called the rational or intellectual theory; the second, based on the feelings of pain or pleasure, is called the hedonic theory; and the third, based on the action of the will, is called the activity theory" (p. 111). The problem with the first approach is that the logical emphasis given by the rationalists explains how we are to follow the good, which is seen as identical to *all* of our rational natures, but says nothing about why the following of rational principles always coincides with universal human nature and the good. Nishida can clarify this:

It is only natural for someone who understands rational principles to follow them in the domain of knowledge. But logical judgments and the choices of the will are different matters. Logical judgments do not necessarily become causes of the will--the will arises from feelings or impulses, not from mere abstract logic. Even Confucius's maxim, "Do not do unto others what you would not have others do unto you," is nearly meaningless without the motivation of sympathy. If abstract logic were the motivation of the will, then those who are most adept at reasoning would be the best people. No one can deny, however, that ignorant people are sometimes actually better than those who have knowledge. (113)

He thought the hedonic theories get a little closer to human nature, but still fail. They fail because, as Aristotle and Confucius were aware, pleasure may sometimes accompany happiness, but pleasure is not a necessary and sufficient condition *for* happiness. There are plenty of pleasurable acts that may not be good, and there are plenty of acts which may not contain much pleasure, and yet, happiness can still be possessed by those actors. Here is why:

Although they resemble each other, pleasure and happiness are different. We can achieve happiness through satisfaction, and satisfaction arises in the realization of demands for ideals. "Eating coarse food, drinking water, and bending one's elbow to make a pillow--pleasure also resides therein," said Confucius. Depending on the circumstances, we are able to maintain happiness even in the midst of pain. True happiness is actually something which is required through the realization of ideals. (124)

Thus, for Nishida, the internal demands of human beings--the basic expression of the human will--is what gives us the most appropriate standard for ethical conduct, because it alone represents the fundamental nature of human beings, and for that matter, all of reality.

It is from this insight that Nishida presents his own theory of the good, *energetism*:

The deepest power unifying this whole is our so-called self, and the will is that which most completely expresses this power. Thus the development and completion of the will is none other but the development and completion of the self, and the good is the development and completion--the self-realization--of the self. The highest good, in other words, is for our spirit to develop its various abilities and to achieve perfect development. In this way, Aristotle's *entelechie* is the good. For a human to display his or her innate nature--just as a bamboo plant or a pine tree fully displays its nature---is our good. Spinoza said that virtue is to function in accordance with the self's own nature.

From this perspective, the good approaches that of beauty. Beauty is felt when things are realized like ideals are realized, which means for things to display their original nature. Just as flowers are most beautiful when they manifest their original nature, humans attain the pinnacle of beauty when they express their original nature. In this regard the good is beauty. (125)

For Nishida, the good is not only the *ideal*; it is also expressed in reality. The dichotomy between existence and value is an abstraction, though really, they are part of the same process of

life. Thus, Nishida sides with Plato, the *Upanishads*, and medieval philosophy, by interpreting the good as knowing one's self, and as thus providing the foundation for reality.

This last point may come off rather egoistic to some. This is incorrect, but fortunately Nishida foresees this, as he elaborates:

This individual good differs from self-interest and selfish desires. Individualism and egoism must be strictly distinguished. Egoism is selfishness that takes one's own pleasure as its goal. This is the polar opposite of individualism, for to give full reign to the material desires of the self is, in fact, to eradicate individuality. No matter how many pigs we might gather together, none will have individuality.

Individualism and communalism are spoken of as if diametrically opposed to each other, but I think that they coincide. It is only when individuals in society fully engage in action and express their natural talents that society progresses. A society that ignores the individual is anything but a healthy one. (138)

Nishida thought that when humans live in communities, there is a natural social consciousness that develops and effectively unifies the consciousnesses of the people in the community. Thus a reciprocal relationship forms between the individual consciousness and the collective consciousness. The consciousnesses of the individual and of the collective inform each other. He thought we can see examples of the social consciousness by looking to families, and on a larger scale, nations. But Nishida thought we should not stop at nations. We should instead extend this understanding to all human beings. This is a large reason for his attempt to account for such an eclectic view of reality and the good. It all comes together as a project to shed light on the individual good, the collective good, and the relationship between the two which fundamentally accounts for one active reality.

Some more elaborations on Nishida's *energetism* will be helpful. Nishida provides a useful articulation of the notion of finding a mean, like that referenced by Aristotle and Confucius. Human beings are social and political creatures, so the internal demands of humans are not separate from one another. They are mutually intertwined, as explained here:

Our demands likewise never rise alone. They also necessarily arise in relation to others. The good for us differs from the satisfaction of just one kind of demand or a demand of a particular time. Clearly, a particular demand becomes good only when it is related to the whole. For

example, the good of the body derives not from the health of one of its parts but from the harmony of the body as a whole. From the perspective of energetism, then, the good is primarily a coordinated harmony--or mean--between various activities. Our conscience is the activity of consciousness that harmonizes and unifies the activities. (128)

In essence, the spirit of individuals unifies to create the spirit of the world.

There are still some intricacies in Nishida's account that are worth consideration. Recall again (C): the dislike of emotive appeal and poetic language in the analytic tradition. For someone like Nishida, the contributions of gifted poets can truly express reality better than the scientist. This is not simply an epistemic appeal to the subjectivity inherent within the dynamics of the world. It is also a recognition that gifted poets are the ones most in tune with the fundamental demands of human beings. Thus, Nishida felt he had much to learn from gifted poets. For example, to further articulate *Perfect Good Conduct* (Ch. 27), Nishida references Goethe, as he does often in his *Inquiry*, whose insight captures this idea of Nishida's like no other. Recall again Nishida's view on the relationship between subjective ideals and objective nature:

Our true demands are not artificially created by us; they are facts of nature. Like truth or beauty at the base of the human mind, the good contains a universal element. Just as Faust discovered as he returned late at night to his lonely study after a walk in the fields during the time of great anguish over life, in the quiet of night when our minds are at peace the feeling of the universality of the good begins to operate in us spontaneously. (144)

This beautifully expressed passage depicts the oneness of nature, and the type of all-encompassing realization that Nishida has in mind in describing an enlightened view of reality, God, and the good. We can all think of quiet, reflective moments in nature; perhaps at night at the beach, or at the peaks of mountains, are when people often tend to experience this feeling. In these moments we begin to see past the trivialities of our individual human life, and become immersed in the beauty and unity of nature. But recall again restriction (C): the aversion to poetry, emotion, and speculative language. Who, among contemporary analytic philosophy students, would think that such thoughts could be expressed so eloquently, and so justifiably, in philosophy proper? Well, these days, they pretty much cannot, and their conspicuous absence is



unfortunate. How much less insightful might his *Inquiry* have been if Nishida had reverted to something completely like the current model? Would he really have been able to better express his views without the troublesome ambiguity of metaphysical poetry? Or is it rather, due to the fundamental nature of human beings, the use of insightful poetry can aid human thought and effectively convey messages in ways other mediums cannot?

## SECTION V

### CONCLUSION

Nishida's elaboration on the social consciousness brings us back to the problematic division between scientific and humanistic philosophy. My main criticism of the pillars of analytic thought is that they have proven too restrictive to allow for many of the immensely important, widely varied humanistic approaches to self-cultivation. We can find this in ancient and in Eastern thought, but in the contemporary analytic model such concerns are diminished and disparaged. But this, of course, should in no way suggest that the analytic approach is without merit. This is only to suggest that given the contemporary Western analytic model, perhaps the analytic approach has begun to swallow some of the other very important and valuable approaches to philosophy which we may need today more than ever.

Framed in terms of the analytic/Continental divide, we should all as philosophers begin to realize that our stubbornness will be our ultimate downfall if things continue to go the direction they have. The years of disagreement between the approaches, and the multitude of brilliant thinkers on both ends suggests that both perspectives contain elements of truth, and that the goal now is to begin to integrate such approaches, not to continue to separate them. We need synthesis right alongside analysis, not an entire tradition that mocks synthesis or an entire tradition that mocks analysis. Moreover, we should let students decide their own opinions rather than framing philosophy in terms of a correct, preferred way and an antiquated, unrealistic way.

We can no longer afford to keep perpetuating this nonsense if we wish to remain open to new ideas and to make philosophy relevant again. We certainly should not frame it to where students

who chose the humanistic approach are generally viewed as second rate. Moreover, we also need to become far more receptive to Asian philosophies as well in contemporary Western discourse. People like Nishida have paved the way with tolerance and serious consideration of alternative, drastically different philosophical approaches than their own, and we should all reciprocate this level of open-mindedness in current times. In terms of ethics especially, not just Nishida, but all of the Kyoto philosophers present viable and unique approaches to ethics that we can learn much from.

Again, recalling Nishida, all of these traditions seem to simply indicate a general social consciousness of questions that need to be answered and a preferred method to get those answers. Keeping his insight, we should not stop with the divisions of each respective group. We should work to create a more universal social consciousness, by being respectful and sensitive to alternative approaches, not dismissive of them. We need ancient and comparative approaches to philosophy more than ever, regardless of how few there are that recognize this. The professionalization of philosophy has increasingly separated the discipline from direct practical applications to humans' lives, and right now that relevance is sorely missed. By strengthening our overall perspective we can again get a broader understanding of the history and diversity of thought throughout the world. Only this will make us open our eyes and see that successful philosophy is open to various modes of expression, many of which go unvoiced in the contemporary analytic model. Some of the best examples of these alternative modes of expression are given in the foundations of Asian philosophy, and the foundations of Asian philosophy are articulated beautifully by the Kyoto philosophers. Hence, bridging the gap between East and West is one of the best ways to work towards a more all-encompassing understanding of some more practical functions of philosophy once again.

With the philosophy of Nishida, and more specifically, *An Inquiry into the Good*, one can see a drastically different approach to reality and ethics than is offered in contemporary Anglo-American analytic philosophy. Here one can see an intense, rigorous, methodological approach to experience, which culminates with his view of reality, and ultimately coincides with his foundation for ethics. This theory of reality both accords with theories given in the modern science of his time, but also sees science as unable to exhaustively unlock the keys to understanding the various phenomena of the universe from the human perspective. Moreover, the openness to psychological perspective, religious perspective, poetry, and history indicates an acceptance of basing philosophical insight from disciplines no longer preferred in philosophy proper, and yet functions beautifully to create a complete philosophy.

With the transformation from his early work to his philosophical maturity, one can find seeds of brilliant ideas which will later fully develop and be given their due respect and interest in various academic fields. In line with Nishida's overall theme, this shows the importance of questioning prior predominant philosophical assumptions, and mutually supports his ethical perspective that the truest human good is to express one's own unique human nature. Through his grand ambition and profound wisdom, Nishida articulated a masterpiece that fully satisfies both the theoretical and practical spheres, and gives the philosopher willing to engage his work something far more valuable than clarity on a minute theoretical problem. It gives the reader a viable way to understand reality, ourselves, and how and why to live our lives in accordance with a greater good. In the end, contrary to popular current opinion, there is nothing more valuable to be gained from philosophy than that. This alone is reason enough for philosophy proper to start reconsidering such approaches, as Nishida helps to remind us they are still possible.

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